

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

# NAG

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XBOX

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GTA with cowboys

Rattlesnakes! We get deep into the good, the bad and the ugly  
and for a fist full of dollars we'll stop the clichés now...

### PREVIEWS

- › Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II
- › Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
- › Transformers: War on Cybertron
- › Splinter Cell: Conviction

### REVIEWS

- › Battlefield: Bad Company 2
- › Final Fantasy XIII
- › Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight
- › Just Cause 2

### HARDWARE

- › Intel Core i5 661 reviewed
- › How to mod your Xbox 360
- › Software tweaks for overclocking

Walk 16 paces away from town from the fork-shaped cactus, at the third rocky outcrop walk five paces to the canyon ridge and look left, 6 feet under the upside-down tree you'll find the cover DVD.



VOL 13 ISSUE 2 05.2010 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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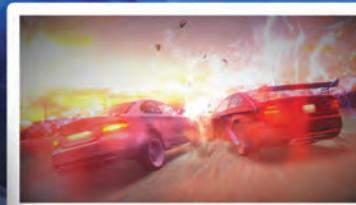
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- \* Processor Clock : 1215MHz
- \* Video Support : Dual link DVI / Mini HDMI

## GeForce® GTX 480 (1536MB GDDR5)

- \* Process Technology : 40nm
- \* Processor Cores : 480
- \* Memory Amount : 1536MB
- \* Memory Interface : 384bit
- \* DRAM Type : GDDR5
- \* Graphics Clock : 700MHz
- \* Memory Clock : 1848MHz (DDR 3696MHz)
- \* Processor Clock : 1401MHz
- \* Video Support : Dual link DVI / Mini HDMI



## GF210

### 1GB DDR2 128BIT



- \* Process Technology: 40nm
- \* Processor Cores: 24 cores
- \* Memory Amount: 1024MB
- \* Memory Interface: 128bit
- \* DRAM Type: DDR2
- \* Graphics Clock: 475MHz
- \* Memory Clock: 800Mhz (400x2)
- \* Processor Clock: 1100MHz
- \* Memory Bandwidth: 12.8 GB/sec

## GT220

### 1GB DDR3 128BIT



- \* Process Technology: 40nm
- \* Processor Cores: 48 cores
- \* Memory Amount: 1024MB
- \* Memory Interface: 128bit
- \* DRAM Type: DDR3
- \* Graphics Clock: 635MHz
- \* Memory Clock: 1580Mhz (790x2)
- \* Processor Clock: 1381MHz
- \* Memory Bandwidth: 25.28 GB/sec

## GT240 SONIC

### 1GB GDDR5 128BIT



- \* Process Technology: 40nm
- \* Processor Cores: 96 cores
- \* Memory Amount: 1024MB
- \* Memory Interface: 128bit
- \* DRAM Type: GDDR5
- \* Graphics Clock: 585MHz
- \* Memory Clock: 3780Mhz (1890x2)
- \* Processor Clock: 1420MHz
- \* Memory Bandwidth: 60.48 GB/sec

## GTS250 E-GREEN

### 1GB GDDR3 256BIT



- \* Process Technology: 55nm
- \* Processor Cores: 128 cores
- \* Memory Amount: 1024MB
- \* Memory Interface: 256bit
- \* DRAM Type: GDDR3
- \* Graphics Clock: 675MHz
- \* Memory Clock: 1800Mhz (900x2)
- \* Processor Clock: 1458MHz
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### H001

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- \* Piano varnished front panel
- \* DIY-inspired 80mm coloured fan
- \* Front panel access ports
- \* HDD bay features anti-shock design



### H403

- \* Intel TAC2.0 vent design
- \* Supports water-cooled radiator
- \* 12cm (LED) fan for lower noise
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**40** Ghost Recon: Future Soldier  
 Future-suit up! Because it's like, the future, bro. There's tons of science stuff in the future, man, like robots that are deadly assassins (yet they're surprisingly cute 'n cuddly) and cloaking devices and other futuristic stuff.

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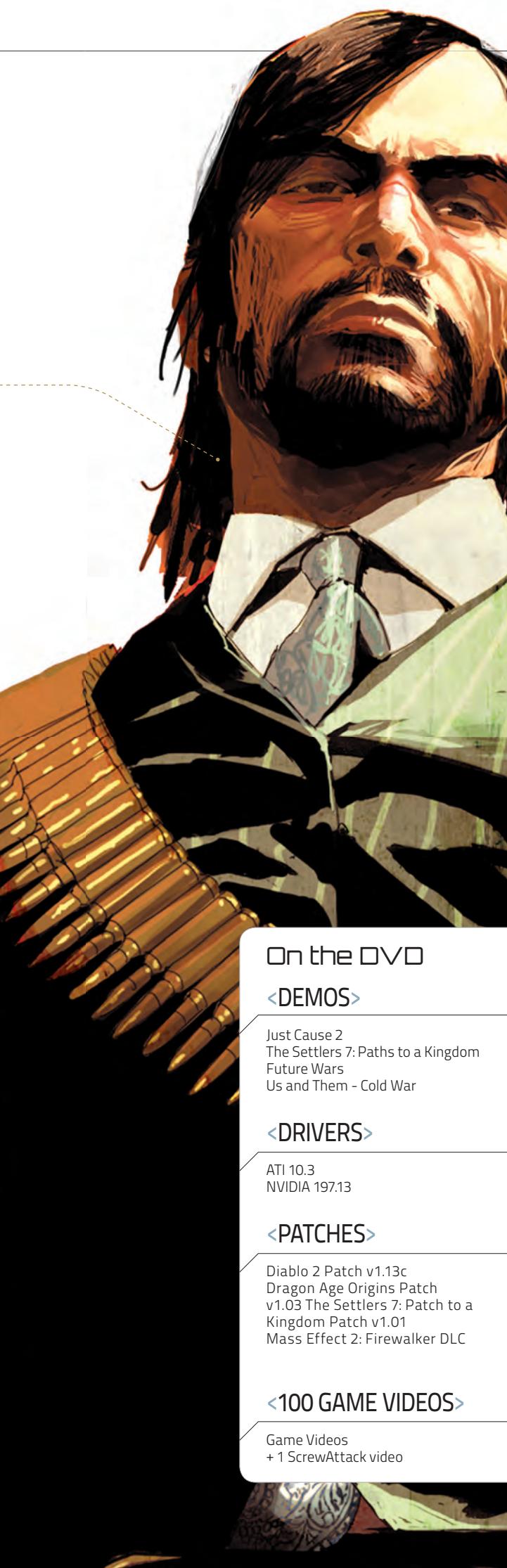
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Why do cowgirls walk bow-legged?

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 Mass Effect 2: Firewalker DLC

## &lt;100 GAME VIDEOS&gt;

Game Videos  
 + 1 ScrewAttack video

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Connect Data Competition grand prize winner will be announced in the June 2010 edition of NAG. \*Terms and Conditions apply.

## Connect



**Data Competition Monthly Prize Winners:**  
**Leon Claassen, Trevor Gush, Tony Senior and Ettiene Venter** - Each winning either the PS3 version of UFC 2010 or the XBOX 360 UFC 2010 edition, sponsored by Ster Kinekor Entertainment.

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# The vitamin's going to get you:

## The birth of a meme



You'll never guess what... This Ed's note was going to be about serious stuff. I was going to talk about how the lack of control on the *Modern Warfare 2* servers is resulting in some kind of devolution of human interaction and that we need automated rules in place for swearing and cheating. Then I was going to talk a little about how dedicated servers solve this problem, and so on. But I really have a confession to make. I gave myself away. I really shouldn't be telling you people this stuff but we're all friends here, and it won't leave the room right.

### BEGINNINGS

One of our freelancers had this as a status message the other week: Careful not to give yourself away. I then (trying to be clever and because I have no originality left in deadline week) changed my status to: Crap! I just gave myself away... I was bored with: I rock!

Then, much later while I was researching an exact quote for the letters page (you have to be sure). I stumbled across something that shook my little world. I was in a chat window at the time and I had to share. Here's what I discovered.

*This is 100% unedited\**

**Michael:** J\*\*\*s

You're never going to believe what I've just discovered.

**Tarryn:** O!

**Michael:** You know in Aliens the movie. They say, 'I say we take off and nuke the entire site from orbit. It's the only way to be sure.'

**Tarryn:** yes

**Michael:** I've always thought until this very hour, minute and second that it was Nuke this site for Morbid. LOL

**Tarryn:** ...

**Michael:** So dumb

**Tarryn:** That was... that was... I have no words.

**Michael:** I know right

**Tarryn:** Who the f\*\*k did you think morbid one? That one guy who gets killed that one time, RIP?

\*was

**Michael:** But you can see how that could happen

**Tarryn:** ... Not really.

**Michael:** No, I thought like morbid - like death and stuff. I was young

**Tarryn:** You know what you just did? YOU GAVE YOURSELF AWAY!

**Michael:** I know - it was a premonition

**Tarryn:** dun dun dun

**Michael:** Gulp. Do I get like an award or something?

**Tarryn:** You get a dumbass award. It's coated in shit. Oh, and it's engraved 'FOR MORBID' in a really curly calligraphic font

**Michael:** LOL. It's funny as f\*\*k

**Tarryn:** I'm laughing

**Michael:** This is how it happened...

*[I cut and paste a copy of the letter from Andries from the Inbox page here, Ed]*

I looked up my reply

**Tarryn:** Oh, I see. Nice one. You should run a theme and include quotes in all your replies.

**Michael:** Hmm... Good idea... Next month I'm too far in now

**Tarryn:** You have to include, "That's it man, game over man, game over."

**Michael:** I'm going to use bits from this chat in my Ed's Note :) I'm coming out about giving myself away

**Tarryn:** Epic. Make us look smarter, though.

**Michael:** Always... well you - not me

**Tarryn:** oh, oh, I see what you did there.

**Michael:** Look, just admitting this is bad enough. But I must, I know someone out there thought the same thing.

**Tarryn:** You need to use 'for morbid' somewhere else in the magazine too maybe I should include a dedication in my column. For Morbid, 1987-2010

**Michael:** Yeah! This is like a meme

**Tarryn:** it is

### MY EXPLANATION...

I was young at the time and I guess I must have heard morbid (instead of from orbit), thinking it was some cool new way these future people referred to the aftermath of a nuclear blast and then of course each subsequent time I watched it I didn't question my ears. To be honest it never sounded right but I made the right connections in my head. Hilarious or just stupid – you tell me...

Nothing else really this month – it's been a quite month that went past without too much madness. This is normal after the April issue.

Later,

**Michael James**

Editor

\* Okay, some swearing and stupidity was removed.

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This issue is pretty good.  
Pretty, pretty, pretty good.

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## Letter of the Moment

**From:** Matt  
**Subject:** Ratings

"**H**I AM a big fan of NAG and I think it is a great magazine but the reason I am writing this letter is because of the ratings. In the March 2010 issue of NAG, Mass Effect 2 got an incredible score of 98. I think you should reconsider the scores you hand out. Giving a game a score of 98% means it is 2% short of the Perfect Game which is absolutely flawless in every aspect – multiplayer, story, not too repetitive, original, etc. and still, in your review you say the game is, "being somewhat too binary at times", "immense dreary recourse mining" and that it's still a \*\*\*\*\* chore, but it gets a 98... As far as I know, I haven't read the NAG for a lot of years now but this score is the highest I have seen. I know this is an epic game but I think you guys should reconsider and make it more difficult for games to get a very high score. Also, on page 45, where you guys compare your ratings to Metacritic and Game Rankings your scores are almost every time the highest, for instance where you guys gave Dark Void 72 and Metacritic 59. The reason is clearly not bribes

from the company's because of the new paper. :) [You didn't. Ed] But seriously, take this as constructive criticism and at least make it a little more difficult for a game to get that of a high score. Besides that, again, great magazine! Keep it up (except for the ratings.)"

Yeah. You sure are right on the money with your observation. I also think the scoring is creeping a little too far north for my liking these days. I'm not sure what these reviewers are smoking but I'm going to start compulsory drug testing at the office on Monday. This happens every 2 years or so, the scores start getting higher and higher, one of the junior freelancers eventually asks if he can score a

game over 100% and then finally a reader writes in to point out the obvious and ridiculously high score of game A because of X, Y and Z. The other problem is the publishers, developers and distributors start thinking that anything less than a 90+ is a terrible score and how can we do this to them and so on and so on. It's technically referred to as a CCF (cascading cluster fudge\*) and it must be stopped. The best part about this problem is I don't even have to say anything to any of the writers because they all read the letters each month – that's right – pay attention clowns, the readers are restless. Ed.

\* This is really the F-word, but don't tell your mom.

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



**From:** Dirk

**Subject:** Mother PC (or dream PC)

"**T**HERE IS THIS NEWBIE at work that told me about a PC he is building – quickly grab something to dry the tears. His specification is as follows... [Goes on to list them, Ed]. Now what do you guys think of that. Thanks for the awesome magazine guys."

Why not help him out with all the knowledge you got from us in NAG?;) Ed.

**From:** Lyle

**Subject:** No Twinkies

"**S**O HERE I AM, watching all this 21-12-2012 hoorah and it's a got me thinking... would the world really be that awesome if everything was like a lawless apocalyptic wasteland without water, Twinkies, Red Bull, NAG or any form of gaming entertainment where we're forced to fight off Mutant Zombie Cannibal Creatures and pot starved hippies with sawn off shotguns while wearing the last pair of classic police shades? Well hells to the yeah. Basically, what I'm saying is... In NAG we trust to save us with new issues with a 9GB DVD and a Twinkie even in the face of Armageddon."

Wow. Interesting take on the English language there – it's like a cross between hillbilly and forum troll. I hope you haven't been watching the Discovery or National Geographic channel lately – all they have on these days are programs about how the world will end if these 3 unrelated sets of circumstances occur at the same time and the odds are calculated at 100 trillion to 1 and it could happen tomorrow or in 100 million years – you have been warned! But I digress. I personally can't wait for

Armageddon – we all need a good shake up and they do say that a change is as good as a holiday. I'm hoping for zombies followed by a small celestial strike. Thanks for the mail. Ed.

**From:** Marius  
**Subject:** Is it worth the wait?

"**A**T FIRST I DIDN'T know what the fuss was when it came to pre-ordering games. So I decided to give it a try and boy was it worth it. I still remember the Goosebumps I had as I removed Master Chief's helmet from the box. Since then I've been pre-ordering nonstop. I think the reason for my addiction is all the perks that come with pre-ordering. Be it a soundtrack, a figurine, exclusive game content or just a different cover. All these things make it well worth it. Some stores will sweeten the deal even further by adding a t-shirt or a key ring.

So to ensure I got my Ultimate Edition <name of a game> I went and paid in full a day before the launch. So after paying I decided to do what all people do when in a mall – walk around. Before exiting the mall I popped in at a retailer that should be ashamed. I walked straight to the game section and as I approached the PS3 shelf I saw it, there it was and in full view of everyone <name of a game> on the shelf a day before launch! Seeing that spoiled my whole day – why go and do something like that? What stops someone from buying it there and then and cancelling their original pre-order? There should be a law to stop people from doing things like this. It defeats the whole purpose of scheduling a launch date or putting a lot of effort into a midnight launch.

First up you should probably see someone about your little habit – we understand it but the judge might see things differently. Secondly, the thing to do with the pre-

ordering and retailers breaking the release date is simple. Listen carefully – stick with the store you originally pre-ordered the game with. People who cancel pre-orders to buy a game that broke the street date only encourage the less than honest retailers to do it again. Also, think about who you want to give your money to – people who lie and cheat to get your cash or people who follow the rules. It's all up to you. Ed.

**From:** Luke

**Subject:** Preview of R.U.S.E.  
[Unedited, Ed]

"**D**EAR EDITOR I AM going to do you and nag a favour here by doing a BETA preview of R.U.S.E. so listen up, your average game of R.U.S.E. starts up by each player choosing a faction{there's currently only two i think}either the USA or Germany, and the players start in a fixed position which they have their headquarters{the heart of the base}and then scramble to capture supply depots which provide income for your base, from their they build structures from which to create your army. each structure represents a certain unit for example the barracks trains infantry which is more effective to hide in towns or cities to launch a surprise attack while other structures such as the[i forgot the name can you understand that i am a complete idiot] produce tanks and so on, the graphic's of the game are fine in my eye, but there's one more feature to talk about[i will call it the R.U.S.E. system]every minute or so you will earn a ruse which can be used to use abilities which range from radio silence to spies, also note that R.U.S.E is a game about deception which means you probably be playing with your opponents mind, there's more to say but i am a noob at this so the spotlight is on you."

What can one really say after something like that? Ed

**From:** Andries

**Subject:** PC go Klunk

"**H**EY GUYS AND GALS @ NAG. My PC just won't shut up every time I start it. It makes sounds out of the ordinary like a creature from A vs. P. I have a pretty good PC BTW. I am a gamer in grade eight so I need help... Got any advice why this is happening."

You know what does need help, our education system – grade 8 did you say. I think it's best if we take off and nuke the entire site [your house, Ed] from orbit. It's the only way to be sure. Ed.

**From:** Kobus

**Subject:** Baginator

"**H**I, I WOULD JUST like to know whether the winner of the Baginator / Beavatari is determined by the person who first spots it and e-mails the correct page or do you guys just randomly chose a winner out of all the people that spot it?"

This is exactly how it works. Throughout the month I receive entries for the competition. Each issue we indicate what people should type in as their subject line for this – usually something like, 'May Badger'. Any entries I get from people who can't follow simple instructions i.e. that don't have the correct subject line are immediately deleted with a haughty chuckle (who has time for morons? Morons don't deserve to win anything).

## NAG Fan artwork

**This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.**



**Jaco Moolman:** "I did this all in the Far Cry 2 Map Editor. It's a map, well sort of, and a creatively designed Badger"

Depending on how well the little bugger is hidden this ranges from 3–400 mals in the time slot. (We got over 400 for the April issue). I keep collecting them (deleting the incorrect guesses) until around the middle of the month when the next issue of NAG must go to print. Then, using science, I randomly select one lucky winner and send his / her details to the Art Director for inclusion in the news section and also to Jacqui for prize allocation and shipment. Ed.

**From:** Phillip

**Subject:** Games and murder

**H**ello and thank you for a great magazine. I have seen a lot of [fixed... a lot is two words people, Ed] stuff written about this subject, but it pisses me off so much I had to say something. A lot [sigh, Ed] of school killing takes place now a days, and a lot of them get blamed on violent video games, but kids also steel cars, has this ever been blamed on games, street races, has this been blamed on games. No school murders have never been blamed on movies! [They've been 'involved'. The movie Natural Born Killers was strongly linked to the Columbine High School massacre, Ed] A lot of movies have a lot worse violence, but it's the games. My IT teacher used to say, it's not the interface (of programs, PC or games for that matter) but the user. Same with guns – it's not the gun that's dangerous, but the people behind the guns."

After the astonishing success of Modern Warfare 2 the whole violins, kids and gaming topic is closed forever. It just doesn't matter anymore, especially after a product / industry makes billions of dollars. This topic is now closed forever along with which platform is better. I just can't anymore. Ed.

**From:** Johann

**Subject:** For letter of the month? [Nope, Ed]

**A**fter an appropriate period of deliberation, I have come to the decision to tender my resignation from my current employment. As such, I have decided to become a professional pirate. It has always been a dream of mine to live the life of a swashbuckling corsair, beholden to none and master of all I survey. Once my

crew of unabashed rogues is assembled, we shall take to the capacious expanse of the high seas to pursue fortune, fame, and hair-raising adventure. Our path may not be filled with the porcine comforts and technological marvels that NAG provides, but we shall nonetheless move forward to carve a name for ourselves in the annals of bold insurgency and death-defying derring-do. Once I have a keen blade at my hip and the Jolly Roger is flapping high above me, I believe I will find my true calling. Please note that I am currently accepting applications for First Officer, if you are at all interested in applying. I will provide a full medical and dental plan, which will offer immediate coverage of all maladies other than scurvy and the occasional bout of rickets."

Bye. Have a nice trip. Ed.

**From:** Willem

**Subject:** Tarryn for Empress of the Universe

**A**eloquent, witty and entertaining while communicating all the info needed to make informed decisions is as rare as a copy of Duke Nukem Forever (and I'm not even talking about the Collector's Edition). I would buy NAG even if it only had one Tarryn van der Byl review in each month and nothing else! I still dig out old NAGs just so I can read Tarryn's reviews, like her legendary review of BioShock. I don't understand people who don't buy magazines, because they read reviews online. Magazines are there for when you are not in front of your PC like when you are in bed or having breakfast or even taking a shower (thanks for the plastic covering). When I'm in front of my PC I don't want to waste time reading about games. I want to be playing them! Now, please give Tarryn a raise (and no, this is not her mom). She is funny!

-President of the unofficial TvdB Fan Club"

*This type of thing is only going to encourage her. Ed.*

**From:** Miles

**Subject:** Wondering

[This letter is printed as it was received, Ed]

**H**ey, I jus want to know if you could please send me in the right direction of how i could try and get a job at NAG... i dont really care when the job is but i would just like to work for a company that has my interest, i have a matric and subjects i had include IT electronics and science and so forth, i know that does not mean much, but im not sure how to get into something that is in my interest, i am also currently a student web applications developer, but i found that is not the job for me, so now im on a search for something new. thanks for your time... also if you have any other suggestions or tips plz let me knw"

*This isn't how you apply for a job here. The letter I is supposed to be in upper case, You're telling me you don't care what the job is – so cleaning the toilet is fine with you. I don't know what your interest is, science and so forth is not very helpful. There are spelling mistakes, the grammar is as bad as the punctuation and I shouldn't be giving you tips on how to apply for a job. See. If you're serious send me an 800 word article and we'll see from there. These kids today... Ed. NAG*

## On the Forums

**QUESTION: So, your thoughts on 3D movies? Gimmick or, something more?**

**Boggle24:** It was a gimmick in the 70s or 80s sure, but -everything- seems to be moving towards 3D now, Gaming, Television and obviously Cinema. The fact that the tech was sort of spearheaded by James Cameron himself leads me to believe it'll probably stay with us.

**Xcaliber:** Everything is just a step towards the ultimate goal... 3D porn.

**OllieTheDog:** 3-D TV might just mean that soon everyone will need a 3-d tv instead of a regular one and thanks to the success of Avatar. James Cameron has started a trend and now everyone has fallen for it.

**Chevron:** While I haven't had the pleasure of experiencing nVidia's active 3D tech, all 3D so far has been gimmicky. Just another marketing check box.

**InsertName:** It's gimmicky I don't want to have to get a new TV just for 3-D and most things won't work as well in 3-D as for example, Avatar.

**Tieron:** I think the whole 3D movement is pretty orsum. I've been absolutely infatuated with the recent 3D movies like Alice in Wonderland and Avatar (obviously). Left4Dead or Dead Space with 3D should be amazing. Or imagine a building being blown up in BC2 with you standing next to it in 3D. Orsumer than orsum toast!

**Spindleshanks:** 3D movies = gimmick/jewish money-machine.

**Shadow\_Con:** I like 3D but I dont think its worth the cost to have/see it.

**pArkEr:** I think 3D is the way forward, and further progress towards our ultimate goal: holograms. It will remain a gimmick, however, until they eliminate the need for 3D glasses.

**echo:** If it ads to the experience, hell yeah. Avatar wouldn't be Avatar without blue alien boobs. In 3-D. Which is better than blu alien boobs in 2-D. Simple science.

**Demikid:** No, holograms are the future, besides 3D doesn't look so good as some of the colours come out as red or blue.

**James Donaldson:** Deciding whether to make the jump from nomal TV to HD and now everyone is saying 3D is where it's at -it doesn't mean much to me now and I can wait to see if it becomes something big, or just a gimmick.

**Necrolis:** Just another excuse to don some black shades :). It would be great if it didn't require new (expensive) screens, for now I think it should just stay in cinemas, but then again I wasn't too impressed by avatar 3D...

**Mr\_krinkle:** It might end up being a gimmick. I just think if it is not applied properly it just might end up dead.

**Rah\_Skill:** It's all Jack Thompson's doing. He's forcing games to become more and more real so that one day we will leave gaming entirely and turn to real life, as it will no longer be a medium to escape to anymore. We cannot let him win. Fight the power by returning to your SNES!

**H3R3T1C:** I feel it is a Catch-22 situation. We have the one side where it is a possible avenue that entertainment and technology will strive to become, be it beneficial/debilitating, I can not say, however it does look cool on the udder hand...

**Bonezmann:** imo, 3D is the next logical step in "visual technology", as was stated before, I can only imagine how it would feel playing games with this. Especially games like Battlefield Bad Company 2...

**Come share your insights and opinions over on our forums (now with new hosting!): <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>**

Miktar's  
Meanderings  
by Miktar Dracon



## Naval-Gazing

**W**ITH THE COLUMNS BEING a paltry 350 words now (I've seen breakfast cereal serving instructions that were longer), the idea is – says the Man In Charge – to have the writers get to the point. No digression! It upsets the children on the Internet! No waffling, side-stepping or pointless meandering, irrespective of what the heading of the column is! These are *Brave New Times*, and that we shall get with them. [The fact you can waste this much space complaining just proves the point. We rest our case. Ed.:]

Games, then. It's news when a terrible game gets a fantastic sequel. *Red Steel II* is a first-person *Devil May Cry*, complete with combos, counters,

*"Square-Enix, when making Final Fantasy games, can make a daytime soapie blush.*

*Their Dragon Quest stuff though, avoids this kind of soliloquy-based absurdity."*

aerial juggles, upgradeable weapons and pattern-based enemies. It's every bit as advertised. It's on the Wii only, so people who don't matter will ignore it. Those same people care not that I'm enjoying *Pokémon SoulSilver*, even the walking-around bits. It may even be complained about on a random Internet forum, that after playing through *Gears Of War 2* again recently, I think it's a terrible game. Fun, at points, and enjoyable online, but a terrible game none the less. Go, write your little emails and posts of complaint, it amuses you. *Sonic & SEGA All-Star Racing* is a *Mario Kart* clone that doesn't suck. Who'd-a-thunk? *Supreme Commander 2* is very enjoyable, I like the changes. Almost finished with *Final Fantasy XIII*, or should I say, *Final Fantasy X-3*, amirite? Haw haw. Seriously though, they should have released *XIII* first, then *XII*, it makes more sense that way. Still, *XII* is okay, after the 20-hour tutorial and ultra-easy mode gives way to *Gran Pulse*, where the real game starts. If it wasn't for Sazh (and his Cactaur-stance when Paradigm Shifting), I wouldn't have suffered through Hope's expletive emotivitiving bull-excrement and Vanille's moon-loony expletive fakeness. Square-Enix, when making *Final Fantasy* games, can make a daytime soapie blush. Their *Dragon Quest* stuff though, avoids this kind of soliloquy-based absurdity.

So, I turn 30 this year. The perfect age. Half the people reading think *wow he's so old* and the other half turn up their nose and mutter *pah he's just a young'un*. Screw you guys.

# The Saga Continues

More news on the escalating firefight between Activision and Infinity Ward

### JASON AND VINCE RESPAWN

While Jason West and Vince Zampella may still be embroiled in legal battles with Activision over the whole Infinity Ward debacle, the developers are not sitting back to watch the fireworks. Instead, they have announced the formation of a new, independent development studio called Respawn Entertainment. Not quite as catchy as Infinity Ward, but there you have it. They have also announced that they have signed a distribution deal with EA Partners.

"Respawn Entertainment marks a fresh start for Jason and me," said Vince Zampella.

"For the past decade we led a great development team and poured our hearts into creating an epic game franchise. We're very proud of what we built - and proud that so many millions of fans enjoyed those games. Today we hope to do it all over again - open a new studio, hire a great team, and create brand new games with a new partner, EA."

"This is the start of a great publishing partnership – one that I expect will develop blockbuster game franchises," said Frank Gibeau, President of the EA Games.

"Jason and Vince are two of the top creative leaders in the entertainment industry. At EA, we're honoured to be their partners and to give them the support they need to hire a team and return to making incredible games."

### INFINITY WARD LOSES TWO MORE

We're all still rather astounded by the Activision/IW debacle, and things just keep getting more interesting. Now, lead designer at Infinity Ward Todd Alderman, and software engineer Francesco Gigliotti, who's been with the studio since 2002, have also jumped this apparently sinking ship.

It's probably no coincidence that they're leaving at this time, which is a terrible sign of things to come. Both have been with the studio long enough to have a significant impact on the *Call of Duty*

series. It's not yet certain what the two are doing or where they're going, but we're holding thumbs that they're going to join West and Zampella on the other side of the fence, over at EA.

### LET'S SUE AGAIN, LIKE WE DID LAST SUMMER...

It's not the most usual way to confirm a game, but Activision have sort-of let the cat out of the bag by filing a lawsuit. The case, against former Infinity Ward bosses Zampella and West, is all about the pair delaying the pre-production of... you guessed it, *Modern Warfare 3*.

According to the lawsuit, the duo "morphed from valued, responsible executives into insubordinate and self-serving schemers who attempted to hijack Activision's assets for their own personal gain."

The case further accuses West and Zampella of "going on a secret trip by private jet to Northern California, arranged by their Hollywood agent, to meet with the most senior executives of Activision's closest competitor." That competitor is most definitely EA, with whom the duo has just signed a deal.

"West and Zampella's misdeeds formed an unlawful pattern and practice of conduct that was designed to steal the [Infinity Ward] studio, which is one of Activision's most valuable assets - at the expense of Activision and its shareholders and for their own personal financial gain," continues the lawsuit.

"Prior to the termination of their employment with Activision, West and Zampella unreasonably and/or in bad faith refused to provide this consent in an effort to gain an unfair advantage in negotiations with Activision and in an improper attempt to gain advantage for themselves in connection with their plan to leave Activision and establish their own company."

"Activision has been damaged as a result of West and Zampella's actions in an amount to be proven at trial."





## In the meantime... Get stimulated on PC and PS3

Xbox 360 owners have already been hammering away at the first *Call of Duty MW2* map pack for a little while, and soon PC and PS3 owners will be able to join in the fun on 4 May. This delay was part of a planned (and likely paid-for) exclusivity deal, but rest assured that the remaining platforms will get everything the Xbox release has to offer, which is three brand-new maps, as well as the return of two *MW1* maps. The map pack is called the *MW2 Stimulus Package*, which is aimed at reducing "mapathy" (or, the feeling that you're so sick and tired of playing the same maps over and over again) in veteran players. The *Stimulus Package* will cost \$15 (R110), and will have to be purchased through PSN or Steam.

The new maps are Bailout, a multi-level apartment complex with a combination of tight corridors and vantage points; Storm – an open industrial area with abandoned warehouses and factories; and Salvage, a snowy junk yard with close-quarters fighting and little space to camp. Returning from *MW1* are Crash and Overgrown.

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# USP 100

## ABSOLUTELY WORTH

USP 100 is a mid-tower that is created with the value conscious enthusiast in mind, built with the classic black body structure. Black front mesh with Blue LED fan and Red front mesh with Red LED fan. USP 100 comes with superior airflow design that supports up to 4 fans. The front is fully meshed and the PSU placed at the bottom is aimed to achieve the optimal ventilating environment.



Cooler Master power-on button



Thumbscrew for add-on card



Tool-free design for  
5.25" device



PSU at the bottom for  
independent cooling system

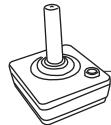


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I, Gamer



by Miklós Szecsei

## A post-mortem

I'M GAZING AT AN origami bird that is blemished by faux grime and artificial blood. A musical score steeped in sorrow and punctuated by a longing piano theme is stuck on repeat in my head – it has been for days. I continually grasp the origami figure in the hopes that somewhere, nestled in its creases and folds, I'll find the means of expressing just how overwhelmed I am by this ordeal. I have completed the most engaging gaming experience of my life, but there is no elation, no longing for a sequel; there is just a complete experience folded neatly into a single offering that I cannot stop thinking about.

There wasn't even much gameplay to talk of, and those with an underdeveloped ability to immerse themselves in a title will deem it a glorified quick time event. So what just happened? How did a title drenched in a hated gameplay mechanic have such an effect? It's extraordinary, but I have never connected with a game's

*"During the few days that I helped Ethan Mars through his ordeal, the boundaries separating player and character started to blur – a startling fact made evident by a persistent lump in my throat and tears not far off."*

character as much as I have this one in particular. I am not a father – he is. I'm not stuck in an un-ending struggle to come to terms with loss – he is. I am not enduring unthinkable situations in order to save my kidnapped son – he is. I had no input in his creation and I didn't level him up once. In fact, as a player I couldn't have been more disinterested in him or his decisions. But something made me care about him; something made me want to succeed in his heart wrenching thread of the storyline. Something made all of the choices we had to make together seem as if they really did matter. The choices posed made me hesitate, they made me think twice, and they made me feel genuine remorse when I made the wrong one.

During the few days that I helped Ethan Mars through his ordeal, the boundaries separating player and character started to blur – a startling fact made evident by a persistent lump in my throat and tears not far off. No game has ever made me feel genuine emotions, but Heavy Rain did... and at the end of it all I was utterly exhausted.



# Bethesda learns to crawl

A dungeon crawler for the Gears of War crowd

**I**NXILE ENTERTAINMENT, THE STUDIO that brought you the ridiculous Bard's Tale, is getting ready to once again take on the dungeon crawler concept with *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*. Their goal is to modernise the classic genre, much like what other titles like *Borderlands* or *Space Siege* did, but with a large *Gears of War* influence.

*Hunted* is a two player co-op game only; players will have to rely heavily on cover systems, melee combat and buddy work to get through whichever labyrinths they find themselves in. Players will take on the roles of the Elf-like El'ara, scantly-clad archer, and Caddoc – big guy with a big sword and lots of armour. They'll need to balance their skills and abilities to deal with enemies and puzzles alike, to get through the story-driven campaign. In single-player mode, the AI will take over control of the other character, and players can choose to switch between characters at checkpoints should they desire.

El'ara and Caddoc both have access to skills and spells that can be used either offensively or defensively: A fireball makes

for a deadly weapon when a dried-up old mummy comes shambling round the corner, but used on Caddoc, it will envelop him in a protective fiery shield that soaks up damage. Players can upgrade their skills and unlock new ones through a *Diablo*-inspired skill tree by collecting crystals scattered around the game world. As a dungeon crawler, there is also loads of loot lying around, but the focus seems to be on weapons rather than armour, so the amount of visual character customisation remains to be seen.

The game looks promising, with inXile going for a tactical combat approach rather than simply mashing away at the attack button. Players will have to use their skills and spells in ways you wouldn't normally expect, but we are a little worried at how the AI will live up to the challenge should you find yourself without a friend.

*Hunted: The Demon's Forge* is being published by Bethesda for PC, Xbox 360 and PS3, but no release date has been confirmed yet.



»

## BUNGIE SOARS INTO SPACE

Developing AAA videogames is a great way to make money, but development of game design technology such as Unreal Engine, Source or idTech is a sustainable, long-term concept that's proven to be valuable to any development studio. With that in mind, is this the direction that *Halo* developers Bungie are taking with recently established trademark Bungie Aerospace?

According to the trademark filing, BA will perform two main development tasks: "Computer game software for personal computers and home video game consoles; Computer game software for use on mobile and cellular phones," and "Design and development of computer game software and virtual reality software; Computer software, namely, game engine software for video game development and operation."



## PERFORM IN STYLE

CM 690 II Advanced raises the bar again with improvements over the top-selling CM 690. The spacious mid-tower will keep enthusiasts happy with room for up to 3 VGA cards, high-end CPU coolers, top or bottom mount water cooling radiator and 1.8"/2.5" drive adapter. It also features much improved airflow with oversized mesh and enough space for up to 10 fans. Maintenance will be a breeze with the tool-free drive bays, new cable management and CPU cooler retention hole.



### » SECRET LEVEL GETS THE GOLDEN AXE

*Golden Axe: Beast Rider* was a pretty awful game. It was developed by SEGA Studios San Francisco, a previously independent studio formed in 1999 that went by the name of Secret Level, until it was bought out by the publisher in 2006. Now, as is so often the case with these buy-outs, the studio has been cast aside by SEGA, to be closed down in its entirety. The studio has reportedly just finished work on the *Iron Man 2* tie-in game, which will be released alongside the film.

"Sega of America is sad to announce the closure of Sega Studios San Francisco," said the company in a brief statement. "It is an immensely talented studio and we wish all the best to all of the staff in all their future endeavours."

## Sword? Check. Shield? Check. Condoms? Check.

*Fable III* is taking its co-operative multiplayer feature very seriously. It looks set to incorporate a whole bunch of activities two brave adventurers would undertake. There will be lots of indiscriminate killing of low-level monsters, looting, questing and procreation. Wait, what?

Never one to shy away from odd little additions to his games, Peter Molyneux (or "The Neux" as he is affectionately called by fans) is including the ability to really get to know your co-op partner. In addition to the ordinary fantasy co-op adventuring activities, *Fable III* will allow players to shed their "Armour of I'dHitThat" (+5 to chance of getting lucky) and "Cape of Come Hither" (+10 to attractiveness; -5 to social inhibition) to populate the kingdom of Albion. Some obvious questions arise (no pun intended): once players stop playing in co-op, who gets custody of the kids? Will there be divorce lawyers in Albion? And should we take this addition with a pinch of KY – uhhh I mean salt seeing as this is a Peter Molyneux game?

Either way, we guess accepting an invite from a friend over Xbox LIVE to play some *Fable III* will now have the potential to be misconstrued as something else. Bom-chicka-wah-wah!



## Conduit 2 in development?

High Voltage's Wii FPS *The Conduit* might not have shattered sales records alongside the likes of *Super Mario Galaxy*, but that hasn't stopped it from pulling in a loyal following that's begging for a sequel. Begging is one thing, but actual development is another, but that hasn't stopped gaming TV site G4TV from spreading the word that there is a sequel to the game in production. It's just a rumour at this stage, but reports from G4 say that they got to spend a little time with the studio recently, when the developers supposedly said that the game is indeed in development. We're not sure if this is a fantastic thing or simply a fantastic waste of effort, but we can't deny that the serious lack of high quality FPSes on Nintendo's little white box is a bit of a problem.



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The Indie Investigator  
by Rodain Joubert



## Ack! Roguelikes?

**R**OGLIKEs ARE, IN A nutshell, quite terrifying little buggers. Not only do they often come in bewildering, text-based packages of ASCII doom, but they're usually pretty damn difficult to play and uphold the proud tradition of bloated RPGs everywhere by being pretty damn difficult to understand.

Despite this rather doom-and-gloom introduction, I still quite thoroughly enjoy these sort of games. They're the gamer's ultimate fantasy in many respects – not least because they provide great emotional engagement through a system of "permadeath". If you're unfamiliar with this funky little term, it means that whenever you die in a given game session, that's it over and done with. Bam. You either have the option of restarting the whole thing, or staring at your screen for a few extra minutes hoping that the destruction of your level 25 orc priest was some kind of sick joke instead of an actual game mechanic. Kinda like *Diablo 2*'s "hardcore" mode, but not optional.

*"Otherwise trivial questions become more interesting when you can't just charge in, die, and reload at whim."*

The reason why this rule is so delicious (and not, say, just damn frustrating) is because it makes player decisions that much more meaningful. "Should I attack this pit of monsters at my current level?" "Should I use my identify scroll on this suit of armour?" "Should I quaff this mixture with the picture of a skull on it?" Otherwise trivial questions become more interesting when you can't just charge in, die, and reload at whim.

Combined with randomly-generated dungeons, a (necessarily) high difficulty level and a generally good game design, roguelikes can add a special spin to many different styles of gameplay. For those interested in an elegant, engaging and eye-bleedingly fun system of game mechanics, one can only point to the genre's current flagship, *Dungeon Crawl*. If you're more interested in narrative, there's games such as *Where We Remain* which draw on roguelike inspiration to tell a convincing story while conveying the terror and mystery that the protagonist faces. Veterans can even play around a bit with the core concepts of a roguelike: check out a roguelike called *Madness* which goes as far as simulating the player's own insanity!

For the beloved reader's benefit, there's a yummy selection of free roguelike (and roguelike-inspired) games thrown onto this month's cover DVD, a list which includes a sneaky home-grown surprise.



# Nintendo discovers the third dimension

Finally, some solid info in the next DS

**N**INTENDO HAS BEEN CHASING away rumours on the next DS since the first DS, but the facts have finally been revealed, and it turns out the rumours were pretty close to the truth. The next Nintendo handheld is to be called the 3DS, and will use a 3D display that doesn't need the player to wear silly-looking glasses thanks to the Parallax Barrier technology developed by electronics manufacturers Sharp.

The thing is, with Parallax Barrier, the user will have to position themselves in the correct place to get the effect, effectively damning Nintendo Japan president Satoru Iwata's idea that the DSi XL introduced: group play on a handheld thanks to the wide viewing angle. Additionally, Sharp's technology has a reported screen size limit of 4", which places it just below the size of the DSi XL. Nintendo also confirmed that the device will be backwards compatible with DS/DSi(XL) games, which means it has to have two cameras, two screens (with at least one touch-sensitive) and at least the same number of buttons as the DS. A

supposed prototype of the device has shown it to have one large, rotatable screen, which would accommodate both old DS screens together; it's a great idea but consider this point to be rumour only at this stage. It's going to be interesting to see just how game developers implement a 2D touch interface in a 3D world, if that'll ever become an issue, although the "3D control sticks" may help to alleviate the problem.

The rest of the details are still up in the air, the most vital of which is the chip powering all of these fancy new features. NVIDIA's Tegra platform is currently leading the rumour mill. Initial reports claim that the 3DS will have an improved battery life and WiFi transfers, as well as a new rumble function.

Hopefully, you'll be able to carry across games you've downloaded through DSiWare; not that this will be a problem locally; we're just hoping that we'll eventually see the new device in this country. Details to be revealed at E3 in June, where it'll most likely be playable, so check back with us then.

## New Epic IP

Things have been interesting in the Epic stable lately. First there was the incident with Microsoft jumping the gun and announcing *Gears of War 3* before Epic's Cliff Bleszinski could make the announcement himself. A comedy of errors, sure, but good news for franchise fans.

Epic have also announced that they will be teaming up with EA on a new IP. With EA as publishers, Epic is working on *Bulletstorm* with Polish outfit People Can Fly, the team behind *Painkiller*. This futuristic first person shooter will be released for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC in 2011.

"*Bulletstorm* is the kind of game we love to make because it's pure, unadulterated entertainment," Epic Games president, Michael Capps, said.

"People Can Fly has created a wildly fun first-person shooter that looks gorgeous running on the latest Unreal Engine 3 technology, and the skillshot system is a welcome addition to the genre. We can't wait to see how everyone reacts to seeing *Bulletstorm*."

"We're very excited to work with Epic Games and People Can Fly on this new project. The first time we laid eyes on *Bulletstorm*, we instantly knew this is going to be the next big hit from these two great studios delivering yet again an entirely new experience for shooter fans," senior VP and GM of EA Partners, David DeMartini, said.

## » STARCRAFT II COLLECTOR'S EDITION ANNOUNCED AND PRICED

We love collector's editions. We also love *StarCraft*. It makes sense then, to expect that we're suitable excited at the prospect of a *StarCraft II* collector's edition, which has been recently announced and priced by Blizzard.

The CE will come in at a hefty \$100 (R725), while the regular version will cost \$10 more than a regular PC game, at \$60 (R435), although this is purely based on conversion; no local pricing has been confirmed yet. Not that any of this matters, really; you want this collector's edition.

It contains: *The Art of StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* – a 176-page artwork book – a 2GB flash drive made to look like Jim Raynor's dog-tags, loaded with the original *StarCraft* and its expansion *Brood Wars*; a behind-the-scenes DVD with over an hour's worth of interviews, cinematics, commentary and more; a *SC2* soundtrack CD with 14 tracks; a *StarCraft* comic issue #0; a mini-Thor pet for your *World of Warcraft* character; and exclusive downloads through Battle.net such as profile portraits, in-game decals for your units, and a visually-unique version of the Terran Thor unit.





## Tiger goes online

To tie in with the release of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11*, EA Sports has released *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Online*, a browser-based (thanks to the Unity engine) game that requires a monthly or annual subscription, but will also offer limited functionality to non-paying players.

Free players will be able to access some featured courses every day (currently there are ten courses to choose from), but the paying customers get unlimited access to the full game for \$10 (R72) a month or \$60 (R435) a year. Additionally, the game has support for micro-transactions that allow players to buy points, which can be exchanged for rounds of golf or Pro Shop items, but full-year subscribers will be granted a few points when they sign up to spend on the Pro Shop.

Taking *Tiger* online in a sports MMO is a bold move, and charging monthly fees plus course fees is taking that even further, but this model could prove to be successful if enough people get hooked and start bugging their friends to meet them online for a quick game during lunch. If it works out, a whole new market could have just opened up for EA.



## Doing TV the Wright way

Will Wright may be a weird, creepy-looking genius, but it seems like he's finally realised that his strength isn't in creating games in their traditional sense, but rather user-content-driven creation tools. Following the relative failure of *Spore* and Wright's departure from Maxis, he's been hard at work on a new project: a TV show.

Co-produced by former Spike TV and Nickelodeon president Albie Hect, the show is entitled The Creation Project, and will have its story entirely generated by the public. Viewers can submit their storyboards through an online or mobile service called the StoryMaker Engine that will allow users to quickly put together a storyboard by using built-in images or upload their own. Winners of each submission cycle will have their story turned into two half-hour episodes.

The show may begin as early as the end of this year, but the online submission system will obviously be up and running before then. This is a fantastic idea that could turn into something wonderful or something ridiculous; you only need to take a look at the hacked mods available for *The Sims* to see what Wright's followers think about more than anything else.

»

### MS EXPANDS XBOX HDD SUPPORT

It's been a long time coming, but Microsoft has finally let go the reins of their Xbox 360 hard drive limitations – sort of. The change comes with a recent system update, which allows Xbox owners to use external storage devices to store save game files, Marketplace purchases, DLC or anything else they'd usually store on the standard Xbox hard drive. Unfortunately, this feature comes with a few catches: the storage device has to have a minimum size of 1GB (not really an issue these days), you can only use 16GB of any device, regardless of its actual size, and you're limited to two devices in total, no matter how many USB ports you make available.

This is a great – hopefully first – step for Microsoft, but they really need to work on expanding the capacity limit to something a little more useable. An 80GB external drive can be had for pittance these days, and would be a simple, low-tech solution for many owners' storage limitation problems. At least the official 250GB HDD can be had for a touch less than R1,000.



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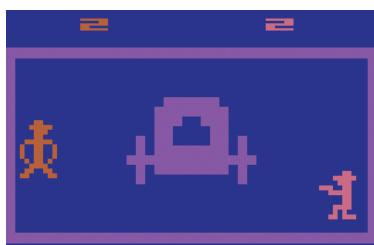
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The Evolution of...



## Wild West Games



1976 – Outlaw



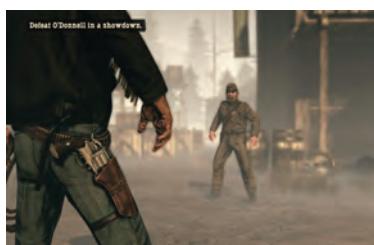
1990 – Mad Dog McCree



1997 – Outlaws



2001 – Desperados



2006 – Call of Juarez



2010 – Red Dead Redemption



# Blacklight gets the green light

Let's shed some more light on the subject

**P**UBLISHER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT PUT out the word of a co-op-focused action-stealth game called *Blacklight* some time ago, but then went dark on the whole affair. Recently, however, they popped open the mystery box and revealed some more juicy details on this game. Let's take a look at what we've got...

The game will be called *Blacklight: Tango Down*, is in production at newbie developers Zombie Studio, and will be released for PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 through digital download channels (PC distributors TBA). Running on the Unreal Engine 3, *Blacklight* is set in the near future with its weapons, armour and tactics grounded in reality, much like what we find in *Modern Warfare*. Players will have access to "EMP grenades that shut down an enemy's visor HUD, digi-grenades that distort the optics of enemies, reactive body armour and highly-customisable weapons". There's also mention of the Hyper Reality Visor: "a device that uses its own electronic pulse and nearby electro-magnetic fields

to render the world in a new way, allowing soldiers to see what is otherwise invisible."

*Blacklight* takes place in a period of global unrest, during which a deadly virus has ravaged the world, in part due to the military's attempts to weaponise it. This genetic tampering results in what people call "Q-Fever", or Sentient Insanity Virus, which transforms victims into mindless creatures that no-doubt need a good bludgeoning or a bit of a bullet to the head to be dispatched. The player will take control of a high-tech soldier operating under the USA Secretary of Defence's personal action team which has been comprised of "tier-one assets" from military organisations across the US, including Delta Force, SEAL, RANGER and the CIA. *Blacklight* operatives are trained to deal with fast-moving, ambiguous and unstructured situations, all of which sounds like a grand setting for a game.

There's no fixed release date yet, but *Blacklight* should be available between June and August.

## DeathSpank progresses while Gilbert flees

Hothead Games' *Penny Arcade Adventures* may have appealed to a limited audience, but recent news that EA was going to publish *DeathSpank* gave some gamers renewed confidence that the game's sequel wasn't far off. That assumption couldn't have been further from the truth. It turns out that Hothead Games has now ceased all production on *PAA* to divert all of its attention to *DeathSpank*, which is ending its creative phase and gearing up for the certification process, according to production lead Ron Gilbert.

It doesn't end there, however. Gilbert himself has taken leave of the company, but supposedly on friendly terms. According to his blog, he'll continue to work with Hothead on a consultant basis, and will help market the game when it's ready to hit the digital shelves under the EA name. He also all-but-confirmed *DeathSpank*'s release on another platform: "...that long and winding road of certification and testing of the Xbox and PS3 and [REDACTED] versions." We already know that the game is coming to PC as well, so this may indicate development for the iPhone/iPad, or even something for Nintendo's consoles. Perhaps Gilbert just fled when the big corporate giant stepped in, but at least he's promised to stay in touch with the community better, by more frequently blogging and tweeting. That's great, Ron, now get back in the studio and make more games like *Monkey Island*.

&gt;&gt;

## CRAZY GUY TRANSLATES FF INTO LATIN

Do you find JRPGs a little too easy to understand? Have you ever thought to yourself "self, you need to be challenged more in your *Final Fantasies*?" Well, a rather insane ROM hacker by the name of Abw has the solution for you: a Latin translation for the original *Final Fantasy*, which was released on NES in 1987.

Abw has translated most of the game, from the menu screens to the extensive dialogue, but admits that he was "too lazy to bother with" the graphics on the world map, the bridge/ship game screens and the game's closing text. It's a massive accomplishment to translate a 23 year-old game into a dead language, but this isn't the first time he's done so. Some time ago, he released a patch that translated the world of *Legend of Zelda II* into Latin as well, but this is arguably a more complex task, especially given the state of English translations to begin with.

The madness doesn't stop there, however; this is all just something to give him a break from his masterpiece: translating the entire *Final Fantasy VI*.





## What do you see in this picture, kids?

The *Grand Theft Auto* series is the poster child for those groups championing the notion that violent videogames are the cause of society's moral collapse. Now here comes some irony that perhaps stems from the tactic of fighting fire with fire: an England-based program called the Get Real project (man, that's a hip name right there; street-cred is almost guaranteed) is using images from the *GTA* games in order to prevent children from becoming desensitised to violence. Yeah, you read that correctly.

The project's intentions are noble as they aim to use a series of flashcards depicting scenes from the games in order to spark discussions about acts of violence and the consequences thereof. I would have thought that the consequences were obvious: if you shoot somebody in the face, you'll wind up getting at least a three-star wanted level, which results in every squad car in the vicinity being alerted to your location. Be that as it may, the project is aimed at those younger kids whose parents should not have been allowed to breed; had they been doing a sound parenting job in the first place then projects such as this wouldn't be required anyway, and the £15,000 budget could have been used for something else.



## The legend lives on

Games Workshop's videogame version of *Blood Bowl* hasn't made much of an impression locally, but the game has performed admirably overseas, given its completely bizarre nature. Based on the tabletop war/sports game of the same name, *Blood Bowl* sees players choose a race from the Warhammer Fantasy Battles collection (Elves, Skaven, Lizardmen, Orcs, etc.) and go head-to-head in a crude, violent game of American football with all sorts of spiky bits and very little playing fair.

The next offering is going to be an expansion/relaunch of the game. Entitled *Blood Bowl: Legendary Edition*, this game will expand the playable races to 20, up 12 from the original eight, each with their own style, tactics and unique skills. There will also be a few new stadiums to play in, from the Snowy Norse to the interior of an undead crypt. *Legendary Edition* should arrive towards the end of the year; we'll be lobbying to ensure at least a few copies make it to our store shelves.

>>

### GTR NOT BINNED YET

Racing sim development studio SimBin may have lost a large chunk of its development team to Blimey! Games, which was later devoured by *Need for Speed: Shift* developers Slightly Mad Studios, but that hasn't stopped them from holding onto their lucrative *GTR* brand. While they've been quiet for some time, likely due to the legal battles between the studio and Slightly Mad over issues of who truly owns the licence, we can only assume that the issues have been resolved, as SimBin has now announced that the next game in the *GTR* series will be available next year. That's about it, really. There's been no publisher secured, and no release date or even platforms pegged. All we know is that they want to make a game, and they're supposedly doing so.

### EA TEAMS UP FOR TEAM NFS

*Need for Speed* needs no introduction for gamers, but for some reason the rest of the world doesn't know all that much about the series. EA has decided that this is no good, and is launching a ballsy campaign to spread the word, called Team Need for Speed. Part sponsorship deal, part film deal, TNFS comprises a number of well-known professional racers, such as Vaugh Gittin Jr, Patrick Söderlund and Mike Whiddett, with more drivers to be announced as they're signed on. The campaign will continue with a 12-part film series detailing the lives and times of the pro racers.

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They Said It...

*"Many people are afraid or scared of gaming technology. I have to admit videogames still have some way to go in order to reach the level of movies when it comes to social acceptance by the general public."*

Shigeru Miyamoto, lead designer at Nintendo

*"I thought Modern Warfare 2 was an immense disappointment. What I thought when I played it was, 'Jesus guys, what have you been doing? You've not ramped anything up. The story is worse and the game doesn't really hang together, it's just a bunch of mission levels."*

Richard Morgan, sci-fi author and *Crysis 2* writer

*"88 percent of the games business is in the US and Europe combined, while 12 to 15 percent is in Japan. So the concentration has to be in the West."*

David Reeves, Capcom executive

*"This is bad. I have to get my mind set on [Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker]. I think about it without noticing, obsessing over it, unconsciously smiling and getting excited. Once again, thinking about 'The Next Title.'"*

Hideo Kojima, Creator of *Metal Gear Solid*



## New Battlefield expansion tactics

*"Avoid 'mapathy' without getting nickel-and-dimed"*

**T**HERE HAVE BEEN CONFLICTING claims from EA and *Battlefield Bad Company 2* developers DICE regarding the game's DLC. On one hand, EA has previously referred to an "extensive paid digital content plan" while in discussion with their shareholders, but the developers don't seem to be too interested in this approach. The publisher has been as specific to say that there will be "multiple opportunities to spend five, 10 or 15 dollars on additional content in the next six months or so".

"We don't ever want to charge for our maps and insisted to EA that this attitude was crucial when it came to keeping our community happy and playing together," DICE senior producer Patrick Bach told Xbox World 360 in a recent interview.

We've already seen the first DLC for

*BFBC*, which was a map pack with Africa Harbour Conquest, and Laguna Persa Rush, which were made freely available for any first-owners with a redeemed VIP code. So the only real option that the studio has for providing new content, and charging for it, is to expand on the game in other ways than simple map packs.

"There will be future paid downloadable content as well but these packs will focus on expanding other parts of the game experience rather than the selection of maps available for the basic game modes. We're dedicated to taking care of this product for a long time - helping you avoid 'mapathy' without getting nickel-and-dimed." Ouch; they're not letting go of the rivalry with Infinity Ward and *Modern Warfare 2*.



### Join the gold rush

We're almost ashamed to report on this, but there's that nagging feeling that online casual games make more money than anything Activision has ever sold, so here goes: The creators of *FarmVille*, that Facebook game that your mum plays and probably dominates at, are taking the casual craze to the Wild West with *FrontierVille*. The company, Zynga, hasn't put out the official word yet, but this information was pulled by a sneaky journalist from TechCrunch; the studio says that they'll have more details closer to the game's launch, however, which pretty much confirms it. Here's the marketing blurb:

*"Howdy Pardner! Let's explore a new life on the frontier. You gotta chop trees to construct buildings, clear land to raise livestock, plant crops, and raise a family. The untamed wilderness is hazardous, but your fellow pioneers are there to help."*

### » BATTLEFIELD 1943 SETS RECORD

According to EA and DICE, *Battlefield 1943* has become the fastest selling Xbox LIVE Arcade game to date, selling 1 million copies faster than any other title on the platform.

"The reception of *Battlefield 1943* continues to amaze us, even months after the game was released," said producer Gordon Van Dyke. "Being the fastest game to reach this milestone is an incredible achievement."

*BF1943* is also available on the PSN, with a PC version underway.

### DOMO ARIGATO NETOGE

The Japanese youth isn't the only demographic being sucked into the world of online gaming. A recent book by author Yuki Ishikawa details the lives of nine Japanese housewives who have all but lost their lives to their online addictions. The book is entitled *Netoge Hajo*, which loosely translates as "online games wrecked women".

"Online games are cleverly devised, apparently causing children to miss school or isolate themselves from society," says Ishikawa, who signed up for eight online games for the purpose of writing the book. "I want to continue to follow such issues."

The book comes from the same publishing house to release a similarly scandalous book that explores the world of netoge hajin, or "online gaming invalids."

FEROIOUS TILL THE END




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# This is better than Disneyland!

Killspace Entertainment, a new development studio formed by veterans from studios including Obsidian, Pandemic and EA Los Angeles, may be working on an *Apocalypse Now* game. The company recently bought the domains apocalypsenowgame.com and warisnotagame.net, the latter of which could be associated with their other, as yet-unannounced game.

On one hand, we're worried that this may be a shameless cash-in on a classic film, to tag along with the seventy billion other war games that are out and about. However, they may actually pull this off if enough focus is put on recreating the emotions, mood and cinematography of the film instead of developing another game about shooting some unfortunate guys with red waypoint markers hanging over their heads.



## Ubisoft's DRM settles in for the long-haul

It's been the bane of PC gamers' existence over the last few months, with every major Ubisoft PC title incorporating it. The overkill DRM requirements of PCs having to be permanently connected to the internet to play single-player Ubisoft games is quite possibly the worst attempt at anti-piracy measures we've seen so far. Major releases including *Assassin's Creed 2*, *The Settlers 7* and *Silent Hunter V* have all been crippled by the DRM requirements, and many legitimate owners of the games were unable to play for days because the Ubisoft DRM servers were down.

Well, here's some good news: Ubisoft just recently went on record to say that their "online services platform [will] evolve and improve". A spokesperson went further to say, "Most forthcoming Ubisoft PC titles will use our online services platform. As with any online technology, we are constantly working to evolve and improve it". Of course, "online services platform" is just a sugar-coated way of saying "crummy DRM servers". So it looks like Ubisoft's dumbest iteration of DRM practices are here to stay – oh goody. Thank goodness *Splinter Cell Conviction* is coming out on Xbox 360 as well.

»

### THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT!

Pro-gaming is big in Korea. Koreans like *StarCraft* like South Africans like biltong, and everyone knows you don't mess with our biltong. So when what's being claimed as the biggest e-sports scandal in the world unfolds around some of the top *StarCraft* players in the country, you know some serious stuff is going down.

While the details are still sketchy, we know that the scandal is as far-reaching as one of the country's top players, Ma Jae-Yoon. Reports claim that there are a number of illegal betting shops operating outside of the local organiser's rules, but that the organisers themselves were actually aware this was happening, and attempted to co-exist with these dodgy bookies. That's not the worst of it, however; other reports claim that top players and clans have been deliberately throwing matches and sneaking out practise replays to the bookies, presumably to cash in on a couple of side-bets.

The Beavatar



## Introducing the avatar beaver

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights... so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of NAG has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere... Get going. Send your sitings to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line 'May Beavatar'.

## Last Month's winner

(We had over 400 entries this month!)



Rodney Conchar, p74

## WIN!

One person who finds the Beavator this month will win copies of MAGIX Music Maker Dance Edition 3 and MAGIX Music Maker Hip Hop Edition 3, sponsored by Edutain.

## Gaming Charts

**Look & Listen**  
DVD • CD • GAMES MP3 • ACCESSORIES  
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**GfK** February 2010 figures provided by GfK  
[www.gfksa.co.za](http://www.gfksa.co.za)  
Sales by game platform

### PS3

- God of War III
- God of War Collection
- 2010 FIFA World Cup
- GTA: Episodes from Liberty City
- UFC Undisputed 2010

### XBOX 360

- 2010 FIFA World Cup
- Dead to Rights: Retribution
- Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands
- Final Fantasy XIII
- Blur

### PS2

- Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
- FIFA 2010
- WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 - Platinum
- Call of Duty: World at War - Platinum
- Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

### PC

- Assassin's Creed II
- Splinter Cell: Conviction
- Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II
- Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight
- BioShock 2

### PSP

- ModNation Racers
- Ben 10: Vilgax Attacks
- Army of Two: The 40th Day
- MX vs. ATV Reflex
- Secret Agent Clank - Platinum

### WII

- Scene It? Twilight
- Red Steel 2 + MotionPlus
- Alice in Wonderland
- How to Train Your Dragon
- NatGeo Quiz! Wild Life

### DS

- Sonic & SEGA All-Stars Racing
- Picross
- How to Train Your Dragon
- Pokémon HeartGold
- Shrek Forever After

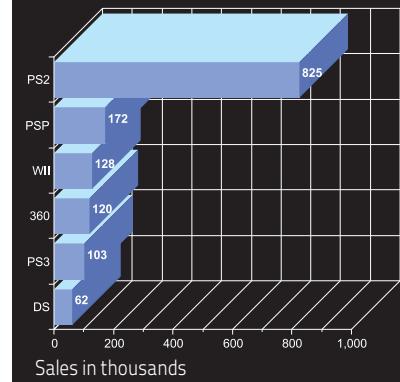
## Keepin' it old skool

You may think that the majority of gamers in this country are all about high-definition, and indeed, we're quite keen on the idea, but sales and install-base figures recently released by GfK tell quite a different story. The install-base for PS2 outstrips every other console combined by a large margin. Not surprising, given that you can pick one up for less than any of the other consoles, probably with a couple of games thrown in.

Comparative sales figures tell a different story, however, with the PS2 seeing zero growth in sales for the last year, but an 11% drop in sales value (likely due to just about every decent PS2 game hitting the platinum range). PS3 dominated the charts with a 54% increase in sales, with DS and Wii following at a distance at 43% and 28% increases respectively. Right near the bottom end is the PC market, at only 4% growth but no change in sales value.

It's clear that the market is shifting to the current generation of consoles, but one can't deny how impressive it is that PS2 game sales still haven't dropped from recent years, given that the machine is ten years old.

### SOUTH AFRICAN CONSOLE INSTALL BASE (DECEMBER 2009)



## Competition Winners

**Letter of the Month:** Darren Smart

**Caption of the Month:** Darren de Waal

**Badger Hunt:** Daniel Campbell

**Fan Art:** Carel Boshoff & Laren Nel

**Subscriptions:** DarkSiders – Rudolph van Zyl, Dane West, Jean-Pierre Batault, Carel van Hemert

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## Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of SBK X for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line 'May Caption'.



**NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:** "Sergei began to exhibit the early signs of radiation sickness."



**LAST MONTH'S WINNER:** "The Apple iHat prototype still needed work."  
– Fabian Schoonraad

## Ha ha! Haxxored!

Oh dear, Larry Hyrb (aka Major Nelson – the Director of Programming for Xbox LIVE) recently had his Xbox LIVE account hacked. The hacker claiming responsibility for the job hails from LiGHTzz.com and goes by the alias "Roid-Monkey" (as in "steroids" not "haemorrhoids" you twit, there's an "h" in haemorrhoids). Anyway, Mr. Monkey gained control of Major Nelson's account and then did all manner of mischievous alterations to his bio as well as his name and location. In an undeniably ingenious way, Roid-Monkey used the newly acquired access to advertise his hacking services to anyone else who needed to, ahem, nefariously gain control of somebody's Xbox LIVE account. By changing Major Nelson's bio to read, "Any account \$100 paypal!!!!" and his location to, "Skype: Roid-Monkey" he deftly displayed his hacking ability and advertised his services at the same time. You cheeky little monkey.



# UFC UNDISPUTED 2010



DEVELOPER > Rockstar San Diego PUBLISHER > Rockstar Games RELEASE DATE > Q2 2010 WEB > [www.rockstargames.com/reddeadredemption](http://www.rockstargames.com/reddeadredemption)

PLATFORM > Xbox 360 | PS3 GENRE > Sandbox action adventure western

# RED DEAD REDEMPTION

## NEW AUSTIN, 1908



You play John Marsden. An honourable man with a wife and kids – not exactly the kind of guy we're used to playing from Rockstar Games. But don't worry, he's got a dirty past that catches up with him at the beginning and sets up the lights, camera and action of the game.

You see, John used to be part of a gang of bad guys but he gave up that life in favour of a more honest way of living. The problem is that these bad guys are still running around causing misery and grief so a few federal agents (later to become the FBI) hold his family hostage, forcing him to find the gang and stop them no matter what. Here's the one line summary for those of you not paying attention... John must find his old gang and 'take care' of them if he wants to get his life back.

So begins *Red Dead Redemption*, on a train travelling to the Wild West.

Rockstar Games in London invited NAG to a two day hands-on session with the game. Around 12 hours of game time was put in with the single player (on an awesomely comfortable leather couch with chocolates) and 4 hours on the multiplayer against some European journalists – we're happy to report they went down without much of a fight, especially the French guy. ;) It's probably best if the experience is retold here as it happened (more or less). It's a quick look at the game world and should tell you everything you need to know about RDR.

### A PIST FULL OF RATTLESNAKES

That heading is the last forced cliché – promise. ;) After the story bits were all done (including an extended train trip) we arrived in Armadillo, a two-horse town. The quaint setting feels and looks authentic and you'd be forgiven for walking around the back of some of the buildings to see if they're real and not those elaborate cut-outs from behind the scenes documentaries from the extras menu in western movies – phew. The little town of Armadillo also feels alive thanks to a number of non-player characters performing arbitrary tasks such as carrying bags from the train and standing on the platform chatting and milling around as people do.

Free from the story and paying attention bits you're finally ready to take control for yourself. From here you can explore the town, head off into the dusty horizon or follow the nudges and hints designed to get you moving towards the story line. The game does drop big clues early on to get the direction and flow going but it's a subtle process and eventually disappears all together as you begin exploring deeper into the sandbox and learn the basics.

Anyway, in Armadillo after a quick walk around, getting to grips with the control scheme and settling in, we were required





## PONIES!

Getting around involves riding your horse across the wilds along roads or rough horse trails. The second you get onto your horse and ride around a little you'll see that Rockstar have nailed the relationship and integration between man and horse perfectly. Getting on looks great (you can do this on the run, from any side or even by jumping off a roof), riding feels real, you can trot or gallop and everything in between. Pressing the 'A' button repeatedly causes John to dig his spurs into the horse's flanks increasing speed which remains constant provided you stay on the trail. Overdo the 'A' button jabbing and the horse will kick you off. Hold the 'A' button and you'll automatically keep pace with whoever you're riding with providing an opportunity to chat (important if you like filling in the story gaps). Further into the game, if you don't like your horse you can simply lasso another one and break it in by swaying left and right (using the analogue stick) while the horse tries to buck you off. As a nice touch, if you need your steed quickly or don't feel like walking to where you left him / her simply press down on the D-pad and you'll whistle for your horse. Getting the horse / human interaction perfect is probably the most important part of *Red Dead Redemption* and they've done an outstanding job – you know it's all good when you'd rather ride your horse everywhere instead of pressing the 'skip to the next location' button.



»

They were called spaghetti westerns because (although set in the South-western part of North America) they were primarily filmed in Italy (sometimes Spain or Yugoslavia) in the 1960s. The term evolved to include any cheap and nasty western movie that relied on blood and guts over story and character. Some excellent examples include 'A Fistful of Dollars,' 'The good, the bad and the ugly' and 'They call me Trinity.'

to speak to the local sheriff, grab a horse and head out to where the bad guys are. Incidentally you can actually 'park' your horse next to a building and then jump on it before riding off into the sunset – it's the first thing we tried and proved to be only a small taste of what's possible in this game. So, after a lot of running around the station and trying different things like jumping and crouching and galloping at full speed into pedestrians on horseback we headed straight to the bad guys hideout – for the showdown and what appeared to be an easy kill.

After a very brief gun battle we took a bullet and the world faded to black. A while later we found ourselves in a bed (crispy white sheets) all bandaged up and not looking too healthy. We had been saved by a woman – Bonnie MacFarlane – a farmer and rancher. Considering we were injured we had to stick around on the farm until we were all healed. The realisation that we were also going to have to find another way to get rid of the bad guys soon dawned because a full frontal assault on their stronghold was an obvious waste of time – something we were sarcastically reminded of often. The house that we woke up in also served as a save point, resupply depot and a quite place to change outfits (similar to GTA).

So, all rested we were now ready for some

light action and watched as John limped over to a horse favouring his wounded side – a nice touch. We were scheduled for a patrol around the farm looking for any signs of trouble. This was done with Bonnie and on horseback. Riding alongside people (holding the 'A' button) serves as a technique in moving the story along as the characters chat while they ride – real genius.

As part of a cleverly disguised tutorial, these farm and ranch tasks soon become more involved and go from simple night watch and beat-a-thug duties to herding cattle, lassoing and breaking wild horses, competing in a horse race and even some sharp shooting while on horseback. All along the relationship with Bonnie grows (as friends, remember John is a married man) and while playing we barely noticed the story bits, they're not intrusive because they form part of the action and the plot. It's a very subtle design mechanic that works extremely well and although one can simply abandon the story and spend the next two hundred game hours hunting rabbits, you probably won't want to.

Anyway, completing tasks on the MacFarlane's farm soon sees John all healed and ready to continue on his quest or not... The line between missions and fooling around is blurry so it's easy to get caught



## WHAT'S THE FREQUENCY, KENNETH?

Fans of Rockstar's trademark arbitrary game world fluff won't be disappointed. Just outside the town of Armadillo you'll find a crude cinema with an 'authentic' western movie you can watch for a small fee – it's a politically incorrect black and white cartoon that runs for longer than you'd expect and will see even the meanest of cowboys cracking a smile. You can also buy newspapers featuring your character's exploits across the wild frontier as well as various random LOL articles. Also in the town we played a game of five finger fillet – a game of skill with a knife – remember in the movie Aliens that crazy game where you have to peg a knife between your fingers, speeding up each time – just like that. There's also rolling dice and poker if you're in the mood for some gambling. To compensate for the lack of radio and television stations and the Internet there's a wealth of interesting characters and things to do.



## GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES

From *GTA IV*, *Red Dead Redemption* uses RAGE (Rockstar Advanced Game Engine) and NaturalMotion's Euphoria Engine to generate the game world and put characters in their place. The RAGE engine was first introduced with Rockstar's Table Tennis and then of course used in *GTA IV* and Euphoria saw much attention with the release of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*. Euphoria is rather special because it allows for full body real-time simulation of 3D characters and unlike typical 'limp' ragdoll animation, Euphoria calculates for muscle and nervous system interaction resulting in a different experience each time. The RAGE engine handles everything else including the impressively huge and surprisingly varied environment which is much larger than *GTA IV*.



"RED DEAD REDEMPTION IS A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT FOR ROCKSTAR AND BASED ON WHAT WE SAW AND PLAYED, ITS GOING TO PUT THE WESTERN BACK ON THE MENU!"

# MULTIPLAYER

There are three important bits to get out of the way. One, up to 16 players at a time can fight it out in the multiplayer. Two, as you play your character will progress through 50 levels unlocking new weapons, mounts and so on (for a laugh, you start off with a donkey instead of a fine steed and must earn XP to improve your ride). Three, the single-player world is available to explore as a free roaming hub instead of a multiplayer lobby, matches are started here and it gives players something to do while waiting for the next round. It's also possible to earn XP in the free roaming hub.

So, part of the multiplayer experience in the single-player game world is forming a posse (up to 16 gunslingers) and riding out to marked gang hideouts – these excursions increase in difficulty. Posses are fun if you like working together but if you don't then there's always 'Gang Shootout' (TDM) where two different factions face off against each other – beginning with a last man standing standoff. Try to imagine the free for all, where all 16 players face off against each other in a standoff – crazy stuff. Next up we played 'Hold Your Own', a variant on CTF and instead of a flag you're galloping across the map to grab loot to bring

back to your base. The map we played was symmetrical with a base at each end and a huge rocky mountain in the middle (added to the mix was a heavy duty cannon and a few Gatling guns). The CTF mode was the most fun overall in our humble opinion. The final mode we played was 'Gold Rush', here the idea is to grab bags of gold and take them to strategically placed chests around the map. You can carry more than one bag of gold and if you die you drop the lot making for some dirty strategies and screams of frustration. It was mad crazy all the way through and proved to be the most frantic mode out of the different game types. The multiplayer has received a lot of attention and already looks to improve drastically on the somewhat average multiplayer experience of *GTA IV*. For those of you that are wondering – you can still lock onto targets in the multiplayer – essential while riding a horse and also making the game easier for newcomers. It's important to remember that this isn't a multiplayer game, it's a single player game with a multiplayer element – don't blur the line here and you won't be disappointed. We were also told that there will be more multiplayer modes in the final game and to watch the press for details.



up in some bounty or treasure hunting quest and then dipping back into the story and then out again – seamless. Of course if you're a power player there is a journal that keeps track of your progress and what you're supposed to be doing next, what you have done and so on. The way the game is structured it's easy to get lost in the game world – a sign that someone somewhere got something very right.

After the farm duties and turning in a bounty and helping some lady find out what happened to her son (not good news) we ended up back in the story and meet Nigel West Dickens – a real snake oil salesman. After tracking him down we discovered that he'd been shot by bandits. We were asked to help and take him back to Armadillo to see the doctor. The next segment was straight out of any western you've ever seen. A stagecoach racing away from bandits while we took pot shots at them, the risks included going too fast and wrecking the ride or being shot in the back. At this point using the game's slow motion target acquisition system 'Dead Eye' came into play. It's a little like bullet time where a click puts on the slow motion breaks and allows you to aim at the bad guys without all the jarring motion, dust and confusion of real time. Dead Eye builds up a charge and has three levels of mastery which you unlock as you improve and make your way through the game. Dead Eye is a nod to the game's spiritual predecessor *Red Dead Revolver* (more on that later in the magazine).

Finally we get back to town and take old Nigel to the doctor. It's going to take some time for him to heal so while he's being patched up there was time to poke around town and see what else there was to do in Armadillo (play poker or five finger



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## CRITTERS

Although we only played in New Austin there are two other main areas in the game world – Nuovo Parasio and West Elizabeth. Movement is initially restricted by a natural barrier – the San Luis River – a little like *GTA IV* actually. Each area has its own 'feel', plant types and wild animals. In fact, *Red Dead Redemption* probably has more fauna and flora than a dedicated hunting or fishing game and every square kilometre feels alive and kicking. In our play session we ran into coyotes, rattlesnakes, vultures, skunks, deer, an armadillo, wild horses, rabbits, dogs and a handful of mean looking tumbleweed. These beasties aren't there just for decoration – they interact with the game world and your character. For example, your horse will get spooked, rear up and even run away if you so happen to run across a rattle snake. Cougars and bears will attack you and packs of coyotes will chase you down. We didn't get close enough to the skunk in case you're wondering. Further to this you can hunt and kill anything that moves out in the wild, skin the corpse and sell the pelt and meat / claws / fangs back at the local town for money. It's quite possible, if you so decide, to spend all your spare time hunting in the game for challenge and money. But that's not all, each area also has different plants and herbs for you to collect to sell and more importantly, to complete various survivalist challenges. Maps can even be bought that highlight the location of these herbs for a limited time in a restricted area.



"IN BETWEEN THE PROPER MISSIONS  
WE ALSO WENT WITH THE SHERIFF ON A  
MISSION TO RESCUE SOME FOOLS"



fillet for example). After some sleep, a little wildlife hunting, saving a guy from bandits and getting distracted by the scenery Nigel was all fixed up and ready to go. He asked if we could accompany him while he plied his trade which involved following him into town and pretending to be 'enhanced' by his medicine – all fake of course. In this segment we got into a fist fight and did a little target shooting so Nigel could sell his 'medicine'. Very charming and funny, but enough is enough and we had to get a little tough on Nigel for help in completing our quest (remember, something about a gang). He then sent us to find a friend of his who might be able to help – a grave robber. This mission was a little disgusting and saw us driving a wagon full of corpses to a quite spot for searching, a gunfight that lead to a dead end, roughing up two thugs, a difficult chariot race and amazingly lassoing and hogtying a woman, putting her on the back of a horse, chasing down the train and putting her on the train tracks (apparently there's a achievement for this).

In between the proper missions we also went with the sheriff on a mission to rescue some fools – this involved splitting into two teams and covering the good guys from a ridge culminating in a difficult gun battle. We explored much of the huge map and marvelled at the level of detail and diversity everywhere. We used a pardon letter to prevent getting on the wrong side of the law. Much like *GTA IV*, if you kill civilians you'll become wanted with your very own bounty. You can keep fighting the lawmen and posses or you can pay the fine. All along while having this amazing Wild West adventure we never did the same thing twice and that's over 12 hours of play (with a few reloads of course). *Red Dead Redemption* is a significant achievement for Rockstar and based on what we saw and played, it's going to put the western back on the menu. **NAG**

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Jump in.





## Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

"You're a Jedi, boy. Size means nothing to you!"

GENRE > Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**N**ESTLED BETWEEN THE OFFICES of special-effects wizards Industrial Light & Magic and movie studio LucasFilm, roosts game-developer LucasArts Entertainment and their stunning window-side view of the Golden Gate Bridge stretching across the San Francisco Bay.

The entire office park hugs the vast Presidio of San Francisco park and golf course, making it look more like a tourist destination than the place where some of the most-loved games and films of our generation are made. No matter where you look, there is something Star Wars in view. Be it the Yoda Fountain outside the main reception area, or the life-sized models of Boba Fett and Darth Vader that oversee the snack machine. There's even a realistic Jar Jar Binks encased in Carbonite next to the original Han Solo-in-Carbonite prop from the films. Every wall in every corridor has weird, old or Spanish movie posters on them, apparently all from George Lucas' personal collection. All this and more than there is space to write about in a whirlwind tour before the main event: our first look at *The Force Unleashed II*.

### CLONES OF WAR

Huddled into a meeting room, we're shown some runtime of the work-in-progress game and reminded often that much of what we're seeing isn't complete and that there are temporary assets littered throughout the levels.

The first area presented is the exterior



You won't find a prettier place from which to Force push people. The game manages a new-found level of artistic realism that really has to be seen in motion to fully grasp.



of the cloning facility on the water world of Kamino (from *Episode II*) where Starkiller wakes up. After his little chat with Vader as to his origins (see the box out "Spoiler Alert"), Starkiller breaks out of his jail cell and runs along the rain-slick, super-shiny roof of the facility, a planetary superstorm making an exciting backdrop. Immediately, even though the game isn't done, one thing becomes clear: the team now has a far greater command of their technology. The game looks like it has double the polygons, double the shaders, double the **everything** compared to the first game. Double the lightsabers too. Starkiller now holds two glow-sticks, one in each hand, and wields them in combat with *God of War* style flourish. For fun, Starkiller pulls a few TIE fighters out of the sky.

*The Force Unleashed* was non-stop fighting, so the team wanted to craft a more measured experience for the sequel. Instead of constant run-and-gun Force-pushing and saber-stabbing (with the occasional stealthy bits), the sequel is designed around a peaks and valleys idiom: combat sections are



### Starkiller's Alive? Spoiler Alert!

If you've not played and/or finished *The Force Unleashed*, then you won't want to read the rest of this box out because it contains spoilers needed to set up the plot for *TFU II*.

Okay, if you're still reading, we can safely assume you don't care that we're about to give away the ending of *TFU*. At the end, Darth Vader's secret apprentice, Starkiller (a.k.a. Galen Mare), finds out that Vader has some people you need to rescue aboard the Death Star. Starkiller heads on over, duels Darth Vader while Jedi buddy Master Kota gets his ass kicked by Emperor Palpatine's Force lightning. Right about here, players get to choose either to kill Vader in revenge for murdering his parents, or they can run over to save Kota from the Emperor. There are two endings to *The Force Unleashed*, though only one is considered canonical and sets up the stage for *The Force Unleashed II*.

#### Non-canonical Ending

If you kill Vader, the Emperor will let you live if you kill Kota. Instead, Starkiller tries to kill the Emperor, who proceeds to drop Starkiller's spaceship, the Rogue Shadow, on top of him. Kota and everyone else is killed, and Starkiller's broken body is turned into a Sith Stalker. You can play the Infinities expansion to see where this ending goes.

#### Canonical Ending

If you decide to go after Emperor Palpatine instead, Kota stops you from killing him, and Starkiller dies saving Kota from the Emperor's Force lightning. Kota and the senators escape. Vader and the Emperor muse over Starkiller's dead body, wondering if they may have created a martyr. Later, Starkiller's pseudo-girlfriend Juno is told by Kota that she was the "one bright spot" in his life.

In either case, Starkiller is dead, right? So how-come we're going to be playing him in *TFU II*, which is indeed a sequel and not some weird prequel or mid-plot addition? That's what makes the upcoming game's story so interesting.

#### The Force Unleashed II

From what we were shown, the game opens with a confused Starkiller finding himself in Vader's prison. His memories are shattered and he's unsure of himself and his surroundings. "We knew at the beginning we wanted to bring back Starkiller", says Executive Producer Hadan Blackman (who was the Project Lead and Writer on *TFU*). "We kicked around some other ideas, but ultimately we're very attached to him as a character and want to build a franchise up around him. So our first order was to tackle how to bring him back."

Vader appears to tell Starkiller that he's a clone of the original, vat-grown because Vader still has use for the powerful Force-wielding moody-pants. This brings up all sorts of questions, like: since when can the Empire clone Force-people, isn't that impossible? Or is Vader lying, and Starkiller is the real deal, revived and simply told that he's a clone to keep him subservient? For the answers to that, you're going to have to play the game. We were told that players will be surprised by how events unfold in the sequel. The development team insists it wants to keep the high storytelling standards that got the first game such critical acclaim. *TFU* won a Writers Guild of America award for Best Video Game Writing.

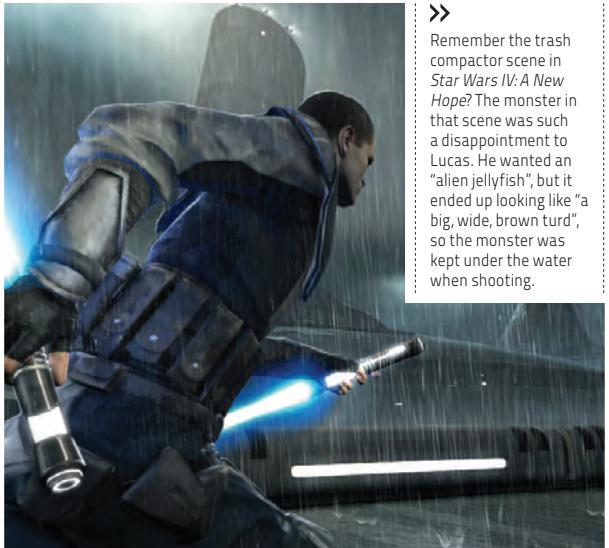
visceral and intense but give way to Force-based puzzle and exploration areas, giving players time to appreciate their surroundings. To show off their new combat system that borrows a lot from recent pillars in the action-fighting genre, Starkiller dispatches a few hapless Stormtroops by linking together impressive lightsaber combos interspersed with the occasional Force choke and Force push.

#### BUILDING A BETTER JEDI

Any and all complaints about the first game's combat and control system have been addressed and then some. Combat is more fluid, connects better, feels more impactful and the wonky lock-on Force power issues simply don't exist anymore. One combo we were shown had upwards of 20 successive

hits on a single enemy, ending with Starkiller making a front flip-and-attack over the head of the Euphoria-driven Stormtrooper who reacts with surprising realism. Afterwards, a few elevators are moved around using the Force to make a bridge for Starkiller to cross. Both events show mature technologies: the self-preservation automation of Euphoria that drives Stormtroopers to try to save themselves when flung over an edge, and the physics-driven Force powers now happen with the solidity and clarity we expected from the first game.

Just to show some of the visual quality the team is going for, another level is loaded: blood-casino planet Cato Namodia where Koda has been fighting for survival in an arena for seven days. The previous rain-soaked planet was a wide range of stormy dark blues and frothing ocean,



»

Remember the trash compactor scene in *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*? The monster in that scene was such a disappointment to Lucas. He wanted an "alien jellyfish", but it ended up looking like "a big, wide, brown turd", so the monster was kept under the water when shooting.



Any and all complaints about the first game's combat and control system have been addressed and then some.



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Pictures from ILM/Lucasfilm and LucasArts studio visit



but this level is the poster child for high-dynamic range sunset-orange draped over a futuristic, mostly-metal city. Except the city is hanging like a hammock under a giant arch of rock over the planet's water surface. You won't find a prettier place from which to Force push people. The game manages a new-found level of artistic realism that really has to be seen in motion to fully grasp. Starkiller looks quasi-photorealistic now instead of the more stylized comic-book look from the first game, and the environments have been beefed up to match. "We've also really focused on the number of enemies," adds Executive Producer Hadan Blackman. "So in *Force Unleashed* we had over 100 enemies and they weren't very well differentiated, so here we have about 20 enemy types, and they're all highly differentiated. They go from the standard Stormtrooper all the way up to gunships". It's a testament to having the core team back together again, they can look at all

the things they wanted to improve in *TFU* and implement that in the sequel.

#### THE BIGGER THEY ARE...

The *God of War* comparisons don't end with the newly revamped combat system - we were briefly shown a boss-fight in which Starkiller faces off against the Biggest Thing Ever, a giant creature that eats that Big Thing you fought in the first game for breakfast. But they didn't show us much, the teases, and as if to make a point we were quickly told that there would be no Quick-Time Events in the game, and no shape-shifting side-kick action (pity, we liked *Proxy*). The team is not talking about the moral framework that will appear in the game. Demonstration done, we were ushered into the official LucasArts store, so we bought T-shirts that show Jabba The Hutt sitting in a giant coffee cup, with "Java The Hutt" written under it. **NAG**

**Miktar Dracon**

## Q&A

JULIO TORRES, PROJECT LEAD



**WE SAT DOWN WITH** Project Lead Julio Torres, who was Lead Producer on *TFU*, and asked him where the droids were.

> **NAG: Do you start with all the powers?**

**Julio:** You will not start with all of them, just the core powers. But you'll get more, unlocking them via skill points. You will end up more powerful than you were in the first game, by design. We feel that *The Apprentice* has grown, and that there's a lot of room for more growth.

> **NAG: Will you be using the dual lightsabers for the entire game?**

**Julio:** The game is designed for the dual sabers through the whole experience, we feel it is a great evolution for him, the way he can exploit Force powers and sabers. It lets us focus on the gameplay in a way we haven't before. We wanted to grab some key elements and really make them special and unique, as opposed to making the gameplay so varied that it's too much too fast for some people. You'll be able to change their colours and find crystals that change their attributes.

> **NAG: Can you set them to different colours?**

**Julio:** Yes, you can make them different colours from each other.

> **NAG: Lots of improvements in *TFU II* that seem directly influenced by failings of the first game?**

**Julio:** We got tons of feedback, the critics, lots of feedback from the fans, and it was interesting for me as a Producer to analyze those different types of feedback and, you know, we're excited. Like 7 million people bought this product, and we want to listen to them, as well as the critics, and we really wanted to tackle this, like the targeting system for example. Because you have such a range-game experience and melee experience, and this world you interact with, part of the experience in *TFU* was if you weren't a really skilled player targeting was clumsy, so we found ways to improve that, so that the most casual player can have that experience. The Force powers themselves, a lot of people didn't find them unless you were really an explorer, so we made an effort in *TFU II* to really bring that up front so that they can see the cool stuff. *TFU* was a brand new engine, it was new technology, bleeding edge, pushing them to doing things they were never used for before. The code itself while functioning, any code you evolve gets faster, smoother so that'll also carry over, just the under the hood stuff has improved because of time and involvement. Because of our engine improvements, we can tell more story in runtime. We've improved the Force power effects, the new one, Mind Trick, is really enhanced by it. Loading times is also considerably smaller, when you die, \*snaps fingers\*, you're back in the game. The whole UI is much faster, changing costumers, adjusting powers.

> **NAG: Are these the droids we're looking for? (We didn't really ask this).**

**Julio:** Yes. (He didn't really say this).

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# Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

DEVELOPER > Ubisoft PUBLISHER > Ubisoft RELEASE DATE > Q4 2010 WEB > <http://ghostrecon.uk.ubi.com>

**T**HE NUMBER OF GAMES associated with author Tom Clancy keeps growing and growing. While they generally deliver a solid tactical experience, there is something else that these titles are known for... a look into future possibilities.

Mr. Clancy is a well-practiced scholar of political trends and military ideas, and putting his knowledge to work, he devises believable near-predictions on a "what if" basis. We saw this in *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, in the form of "what if urban warfare broke out in one of the USA's closest neighbours?" We saw it in *HAWX*, posed as "what if private military corporations became powerful enough to out-gun governments?" We saw it in *EndWar*, posing the question "what if a group of people orchestrated events that lead to a world war, in an effort to control natural resources?"

The thing with these scenarios that are put forward in the games is that they are believable, viable possibilities. Some may be a little more extreme than others, but they all fall into a realm of 'could happen', rather than 'no chance'.

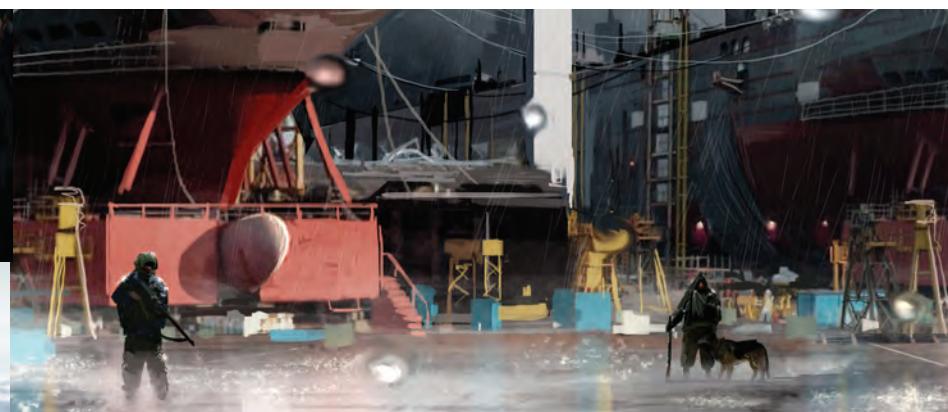
Another interesting (and often exciting) aspect of these games is that they feature weapon and equipment technology that, while not widespread yet, is based on current research and prototyping. The technology isn't science-fiction, but it's not science-fact either; it treads a middle-ground that could be called 'science-possibility'.

The upcoming *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* sticks to these principles. The game features a political climate that could quite possibly occur, and plays host to technology that will possibly exist in the near future. The game promises to take the player into a world of technologically advanced warfare that doesn't break into the realms of science-fiction, set in an environment that is familiar and ultimately believable.

As the world races towards the concept of more efficient super-soldiers, the various Tom Clancy franchises show gamers possible paths for the future of modern conflict and political climates. Aside from excellent production values and intense action, the feeling of authenticity injected into the titles through careful consideration of what the near future might hold makes them addictive and ultimately compelling.



Ghosts now run, leap, slide and kick farther and faster than any man on the field today, and they can now carry up to 300 pounds, although it feels like 40.



**They are the point of the spear in every operation, deploying in small and versatile units of elite warriors that can be put in the field immediately, anywhere in the world.**

**> For newcomers, who are the Ghosts?**

The Ghosts are the U.S. Army's chosen soldiers for the battlegrounds of tomorrow. They are the point of the spear in every operation, deploying in small and versatile units of elite warriors that can be put in the field immediately, anywhere in the world. Experts in hi-tech weapons systems and close combat, Ghosts are sent deep behind enemy lines, where they strike swiftly and suddenly, and then vanish.

**> Why have you pushed the series even further in time with *Future Soldier*?**

The "future war" promise has always been at the heart of *Ghost Recon* games, culminating in plausible, compelling, near-future conflicts that are a signature of Clancy... We equip players with the world's hottest future combat systems, inspired by existing prototypes, and unleash them on the battlefield of tomorrow. Ghosts are in essence the elite soldiers of the future; and their mind-blowing tech is yours to play with right now.

When dealing with a plausible future we are often forced to dumb down even existing tech, as people simply don't believe it exists. If I showed you an iPhone or a movie in Real 3D even 15 years ago, most people would have laughed and said it was science fiction!

The authenticity of technology, tactics and gear is something we spend a lot of time researching and implementing in the game. The game's artistic and the creative vision is based on a realistic evolution of the prototypes being built today. So even if a weapon looks "futuristic", it remains technically plausible in terms of mechanics and functionality.

**> What type of new gear do you get to play with?**

As the battlefield changes, the gear must adapt to fit new tactical needs. The first crucial element of the gear is the soldier himself. A Ghost is versatile, self-reliant and can adapt to a wide variety of insane combat situations. Ghosts operate behind enemy lines autonomously, and with increasing frequency in close range. In line with the Future Soldier program, a spec ops warrior

cannot afford to be a specialist in just one area of combat. Elite soldiers cross-train constantly in order to master the entire Ghost arsenal. Each Ghost must know what the Engineer, Commando, Recon and Sniper knows, almost as well as the specialist – the more versatile the soldier, the more chance of winning a Future War.

In short, our military consultants described the future soldier as an F-16 on legs! That pretty much sets the tone...

We started by researching all the sexiest new gear in the making and were inspired by real U.S. Military research programs like the Future Soldier 2030 initiative (developed by Natick, a contractor specialising in anticipatory needs). Then we chose the ones that worked best in terms of gameplay mechanics, thanks to specific advantages to the soldier and his unit, and then applied them to a variety of gameplay mechanics.

Here's a glimpse of some of the tech that gives our Ghosts the edge on the battlefields of tomorrow; inspired by the world's most advanced combat technology currently under development.

**The Exoskeleton:** as much a part of every Ghost's basic gear as a rucksack today—enhances mobility, increases endurance and enables the Ghost to be stronger and faster. Ghosts now run, leap, slide and kick farther and faster than any man on the field today, and they can now carry up to 300 pounds, although it feels like 40. For the player it means you can carry around your med packs, ammunition and grenades, and a brand new, hefty Back Mortar.

**The Back Mortar** increases a Ghost's individual firepower; it's like a pimped-out, heat-seeking rocket launcher. So if your primary and secondary weapon aren't having the desired effect. Blow it to bits with your Back Mortar! When linked up with your team, this weapon can deploy four simultaneous, guided rockets to devastating effect.

**Optical Camo** is one of my favourites because nobody believes it exists... But we're not as far from implementation as you might think! Camo is a huge part of any military strategy, since you can't kill what



**When dealing with a plausible future we are often forced to dumb down even existing tech, as people simply don't believe it exists.**



you can't see! The Ghosts' Optical Camo is based on camera and projection technology. Basically it films the environment around you and then projects it onto you, so that you blend into the background. This is great for a stealthy insertion, an ambush, but also to take down enemies at close range.

**The Cross-Com** is back of course, and a version of this particular device is already used on real battlefields today. You'll get increased situational awareness with the Ghosts' 3.0 version, and snipers gain additional intelligence. Thanks to the updated Cross-Com system a Ghost Engineer can assume full control of armoured UAVs equipped with some serious firepower. You will be able to see what your drone sees and get an overview of the battlefield.

This adds a new layer to combat tactics, particularly when playing Co-op or MP. As an engineer, you and your teammates will particularly benefit from the Link-up system in particular.

**> GR was always known as a squad-based tactical shooter, for GRFS we understand the squad has evolved to something called the Link-up system, has this replaced the classic squad gameplay and how does it work?**

Professional gamers and obviously real spec ops train for years to be able to move, react, and deal with intense situations as a single and often isolated unit. "The brotherhood" is more than just an expression – these warriors live, breathe, and fight to protect one another. We want you to feel what it's like to be a part of

this tight-knit "unit" and benefit from it in terms of your gameplay experience. The game is about a small number of highly versatile soldiers. Specialization is out ... versatility is in! Thanks to the different abilities of unit's members, the player has the entire arsenal of the future soldier at his fingertips.

The Link-Up system is accessible and simple to use – no more babysitting or contextual orders for your team. You've got a simple snap-in and snap-out function to regroup or leave your unit. Congratulations! You now have 10 years of spec ops training at the click of a button.

It works seamlessly in all the modes, story, Co-op and MP. Basically, as you move through a map, you can easily regroup with your unit at anytime with one click or press. Once you have linked up, your unit will benefit from each Ghost's special gear abilities, like Optical Camo or the multi-mortar boost your Commando gets (he can launch several guidable darts with his back mortar either on multiple targets, or on one heavily armoured target).

In MP and Co-op, newer recruits can also benefit from playing with more experienced players. When you link up with a more experienced teammate you can concentrate exclusively on aiming and shooting while the player who knows the map best guides the unit. That's the best way to learn the levels topography and improve your own skill, guided by the best. You can also pilot a drone when linked up, while a teammate steers and protects you. **NAG**





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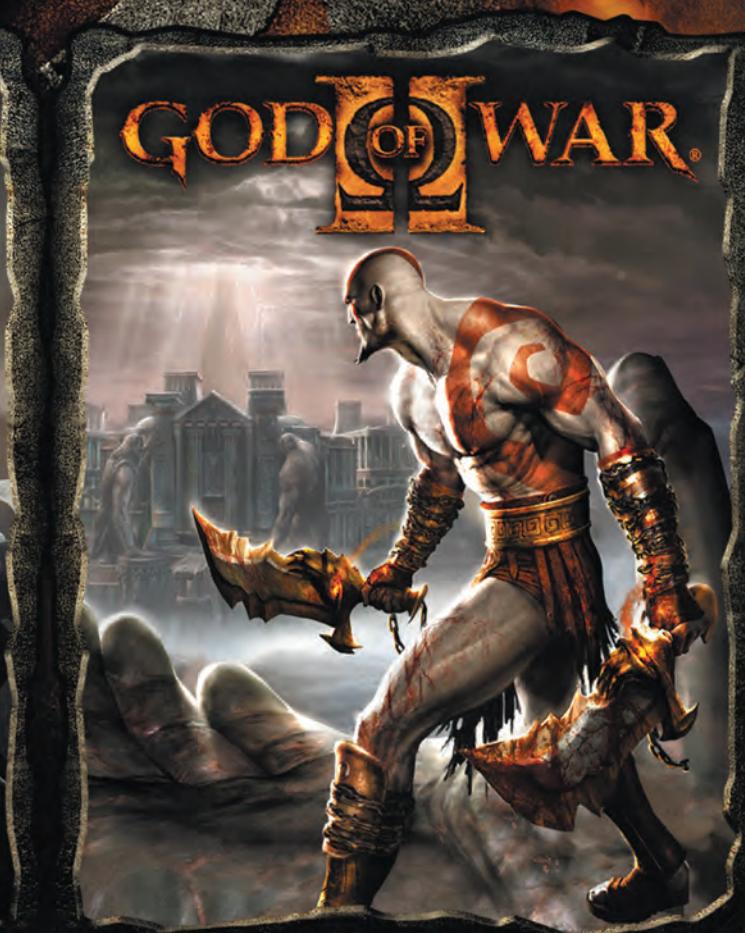
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## Splinter Cell: Conviction

Eye of the Panther

GENRE > Third-Person Shooter/Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

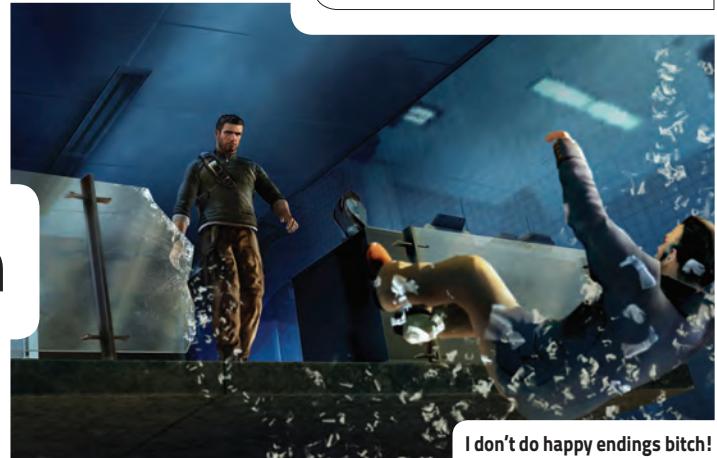
**TRY NOT TO THINK** of *Splinter Cell*:

*Conviction* as a traditional *Splinter Cell* title. Try to think of it more as an episode of the TV series *24*, but without Kiefer Sutherland. If you'd like, you could try to imagine *Splinter Cell: Conviction* as the unofficial game based on *The Bourne Identity/Supremacy/Tomfoolery/McSausage* – that whole series. We've got some preview code for the game in our glorious office, and it's safe to say that, just as *Double Agent* mixed things up and toyed with the idea of making Sam Fisher more than just a super-stealthy, secret agent-type dude, *Conviction* is also taking the series' formula and adding some Xs where there were once Ys. Don't see this as a bad thing, because it really isn't: the latest game in the excellent series may not play the way we've become accustomed to, but it sure is looking very, very promising in every way.

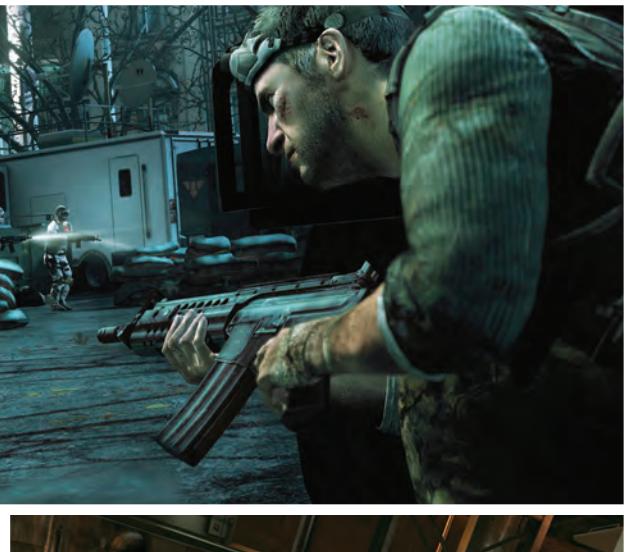
Sam Fisher (once again voiced by Michael Ironside) is out of the spy game at the start of *Conviction*. He's trying to get by as a civilian after having left Third Echelon, but we all know that that's not how things work in the world of daring spy stuff (and that's definitely not how it works in the world of videogames), so his little sabbatical (because, all the talk of quitting and stuff aside, we all know that's what this was really all about – getting some free vacation time) doesn't last very long. Bullets start flying very early on and the bad guys realise extremely quickly that Sam is like a human bulldozer. Frankly, we're quite surprised by just how badass Mr Fisher has become – turns out the guy didn't need to do all that sneaking around to stay alive in

### SneakFest 2010

*Conviction's* multiplayer can be enjoyed by two players and offers up a number of cooperative game modes (there's only one competitive mode – still limited to only two players). A cooperative campaign, dubbed Prologue, is said to offer almost six hours of gameplay and will further the single-player campaign's story. Deniable Ops is a collection of quick, fun multiplayer modes, in the form of Hunter, Infiltration, Last Stand and Face Off. Hunter requires that you work together to clear the map of enemies. Infiltration is the same, except that if you're detected by an enemy, you fail the mission. Last Stand has you protecting an EMP device from waves of enemies. Finally, Face Off is the lone competitive mode, with the two players going head to head. AI opponents can be added to a game of Face Off to mix things up. Special cooperative moves and character customisation will be available in the multiplayer.

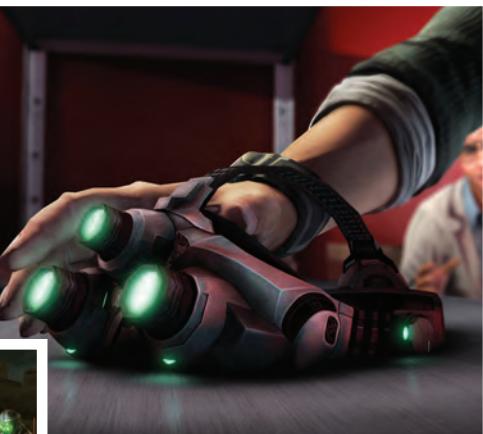


I don't do happy endings bitch!



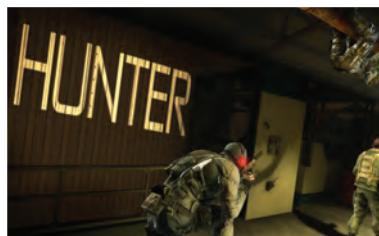
the previous games, because whether he's taking on enemies head on or silently taking them out from the safety of the shadows, he's clearly quite capable of handling himself in any given situation. Sam's former handlers used the codename "Panther" when communicating with him, which, it turns out, is actually quite appropriate in *Conviction*. Fisher is faster, more agile, tougher and about as deadly as a hungry Michael James in *Conviction*. He's done away with his trademark Multi-Vision Goggles, he's wearing civilian clothes and he's pretty damn angry (because he's gradually discovering the truth





»

Tom Clancy originally rejected the idea of Sam's iconic trifocal goggles. He stated that goggles that boasted both night vision and heat vision were impossible to make, and they shouldn't be in the game. The developers eventually convinced Clancy that, from a gameplay perspective, having separate sets of goggles for each would be awkward and so the goggles made their way into the game.



behind the death of his daughter, Sarah, and he's going after the people responsible). Instead of all his trademark gadgets, he's going in with the greatest weapon he has access to: himself. That's not to say there won't be gadgets at all – but who needs gadgets when you're Sam Fisher?

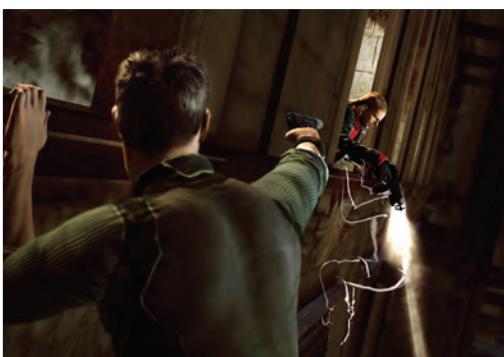
*Conviction* brings a number of cool new gameplay features. "Mark and Execute" allows Sam to tag a limited number of enemies and quickly take them out without you needing to go through the rigmarole of actually, y' know, aiming at them. In order to use this, however, you have to perform hand-to-hand kills on enemies. Once you've done so, you'll then be able to use Mark and Execute. "Last Known Position" is basically a visual representation of using your enemy's awareness of your presence against them. If an enemy spots you, you can leave the area you're in and a silhouette of Sam will remain, which highlights the area around which the bad guys will focus their search for you. Flank around them while they waste time emptying bullets on your Last Known Position, and you've found yourself a convenient new way to take out bad guys – without needing to hide in the shadows. You'll still be able to hide in the shadows (the screen turns black and white when you do so, to indicate that you're nearly invisible to enemies) and pick enemies off silently, but it's not essential in *Conviction*, and sometimes briefly showing your face to the enemies will work in your favour. Sam's far more versatile and acrobatic than ever before, able to shimmy along ledges quickly, use cover, shoot environmental

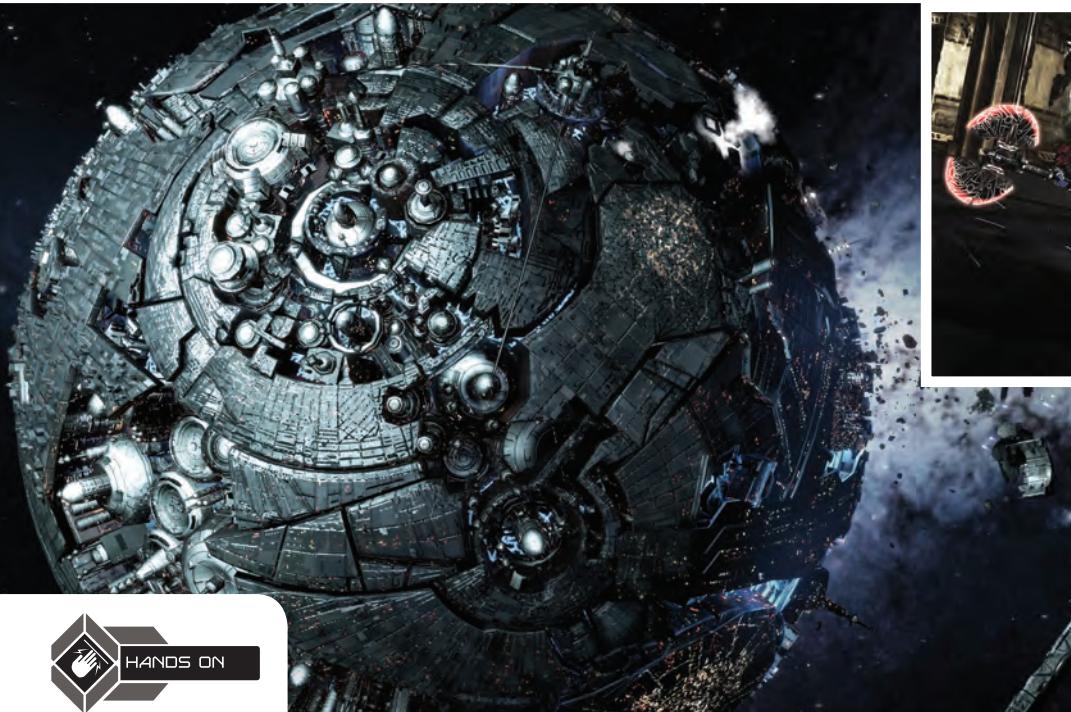
objects (like chandeliers) to spectacularly take out multiple enemies and more. Sam's newfound speed and increased agility, together with each new move in Sam's repertoire, makes finding new ways to take out bad guys very exciting (like by pulling them out of open windows, for example). He's also able to do stuff like set off car alarms to create distractions, making slipping into heavily guarded areas painless.

Every once in a while throughout *Conviction*, you'll find yourself in an interrogation sequence – when Sam needs info from some dude, you'll take control of him as he asks questions and forces answers by banging the face of the person he needs information from into environmental stuff like pianos and urinals. Weapons and other stuff can be upgraded by earning P.E.C. (Persistent Elite Creation) points, so you can add laser sights and other cool and deadly modifications to your bag o' tricks. The story, objectives and critical info in the game are stylishly represented by text and video superimposed into the game world (you may have seen this effect in screenshots and trailers). This works great for keeping you immersed in the game and not breaking the flow, and the story elements that pop up are a nice way of keeping you aware of what's going through Sam's mind at any given time.

By the time you read this, the game will already have made its way to store shelves and our review should be in next month's issue. You might even be playing it already. If you're not, all you really need to know is that, based on what we've played so far, this game is going to be impressive. The slick presentation of it all is outstanding, even in the early build we played. It may not be the *Splinter Cell* we're used to playing (as far as we can tell, at least) – but it's exciting and fun in its own unique way. **NAG**

Dane Remendes





# Transformers: War For Cybertron

Gears At War

GENRE > Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**O**N NEARLY EVERY WALL hangs a giant poster of stunning *Transformers*-themed concept artwork. There are a lot of walls in High Moon Studio's warehouse-filling offices. The staggering amount of concept work the developer has done for their upcoming game must be a world record.

In one corner, a programmer is adding a few lines of code to the game, while at the same time watching VHS tapes of the original 80s *Transformers* cartoon. Every cubicle is filled to the brim with toys, memorabilia, paraphernalia and posters related to the 25-year old franchise. The original Hasbro toy line that focused on the war between two factions of transforming robots has, over two and a half decades, grown to encompass cartoons, movies, comic books, video games and much more. Sadly, the games have generally sucked ass. But no more!

## CYBERTRON REVEALED

Hasbro gave High Moon carte blanche, allowing the developer to be creative with a property its employees love. One aspect of the *Transformers* history that has remained mostly untouched is their origin homeworld of Cybertron, so High Moon used that as their central premise: the war between two factions on Cybertron, before events led the battle to Earth.

In a twist that goes against convention, what the studio did was build a game first, then apply the license. Usually, developers that have been tasked with making a game for a license tend to work top-down, trying to fit a game into the licence's paradigms. The result is often a top-heavy mess that while faithful, isn't that good of a game. The main thing High Moon wanted to do was make a game

that above all else, was fun to play and balanced in multiplayer. So they sat down, built the framework and massaged the movement, physics and gunplay until they had what is truthfully, as good as *Gears of War*. Then, they worked in vehicle transformations and finally, crafted a style, aesthetic and universe around it, placing the metaphorical cherry on top.

The Decepticons and Autobots derive from warring philosophies between the Cybertronians: the former believes in

»  
Because many fans were "irked by the Michael Bay insect-like versions" (that have been dubbed "Bayformers") of the Autobots and Decepticons, the design team put a more "modern" polish on the style, hoping to evoke the feel of the Generation 1 cartoon.

a caste-based society while the latter cherish freedom above all else. This divide between the native population sparks the Cybertronian War and sets the scene for the game, which is in no way related to the movies. Hasbro liked the setting and designs for the *Transformers* that High Moon came up with so much, they're releasing a toy line based on it and have sanctioned the game as the official back-story for the Generation 1 series of *Transformers*.

## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The bottom line to the game as explained to us during its demonstration: it has single-player, online co-operative through the single-player campaign, and a fully-featured online multiplayer with all the trimmings. It's a third-person shooter that anyone who's played *Gears of War* will recognize (just without the cover-system), and you have the ability to transform from robot to vehicle anytime, anywhere. Melee attacks feature, but the focus is on gunplay. Transformation, by clicking the left stick, can even be interrupted midway if needed. Health comes via a four-segment HP bar, a segment will regenerate but if fully depleted it will be lost, so you'll have to use a health pack or be healed by a team-mate.

Every character (you get to pick one of the three provided for a given mission before it starts) has two abilities: Cooldown and Resource. Cooldown abilities provide options in battle, like a rapid Dash, and will regenerate automatically. Resource abilities, like Optimus's team-buff warcry, requires Energon pickups to use. Abilities are one of the pillars to High Moon's four-pillared "Combat Tactics" ideology. In terms of tactical approach to a situation, weapons are the first consideration, such as shotgun VS. sniper rifle. Second is the vehicles: jets VS. cars. Third are the abilities, proper timing on Cooldown and Resource usage. Lastly, transformations lead to quick flanking since you're not stuck at one speed. In multiplayer this ideology becomes very integral to the battle.

## OUR ROBOT FRIENDS

We were given some hands-on with the runtime, which after 19 months of development, looks and feels like a

complete game. The shiny metal and Tron-esque dayglow lines over everything looks fantastic, but you'll see that for yourself in the videos and screenshots. High Moon has worked with the Unreal Engine 3 before and clearly have a grasp of it on par with Epic themselves. Even banalities like interacting with an elevator button has been given a complex animation for flourish: characters transform to interface with Cybertron's machines, with the planet itself, in a way that seems so obvious yet interesting.

## SINGLE PLAYER

The short single-player mission we tried had plenty of running, gunning, things going boom... while there might not be gore in the traditional sense since nothing bleeds, there is plenty of tracer fire and explosions to make up for it. Your two teammates provide chatter and some extra firepower, but more importantly, they'll run over to revive you if you get downed. While you're waiting to be 'fixed', you can still aim and shoot from the ground, like *Left 4 Dead*. The level ended with a bossfight against a big *Matrix Revelations* style digger that shoots lasers. Again, it's pretty much *Gears of War* with giant transforming robots, which is not a bad thing.

## MULTIPLAYER

The most surprising part of our hands-on with the multiplayer against other journalists, is how featured the entire package is. You level up (with ranks), unlock upgrades, create custom Transformers with custom paint jobs, the works. Experience gained from battles level up one of the four classes, you can switch between classes during the match to react to situations (you change once respawned, like Team Fortress), and every class is unique.

You pick two weapons, two abilities and three upgrades, and that's your custom

## Generations upon Generations

From 1984 to current, the *Transformers* franchise is stratified into various groupings, reboots and a variety of spin-off universes. It would take almost 10 pages for exactitude, so instead here is the bare-bones long-story-made-short rendition. You're welcome.

### 1984-1994: GENERATION ONE (G1)

Hasbro hit it big with *G.I. Joe* toys, so they bought some unnamed transforming robot toys from Japan called *Microman & Diaclone* and renamed them *Transformers* for the American market, giving them names, backstories and personalities. The toy line had one story (Optimus & Megatron arrive on pre-historic Earth then awake in 1984), the cartoon that began around the same time had another (Autobots looking for new energy crash-land on Earth). In both cases, the transforming robots came from their home planet of Cybertron. The toys, cartoon and Marvel comics were a huge hit, and the robots in disguise (some could become vehicles, others could become dinosaurs) became a part of the DNA of any kid of that decade.

### 1993-1995: GENERATION 2

To keep kids interested, a new toy line and Marvel comic was released. Bizarrely, it revealed that the Transformers breed asexually, but Primus stopped the appliances from getting it on, because it created the evil "Swarm". Optimus and Megatron teamed up against a new third faction.

### 1996-2001: BEAST WARS/MACHINES

With vehicular transformations not being as cool anymore, the franchise shifts to an animal-based theme. Maximals (Autobots) VS. Predacons (Decepticons) on a prehistoric Earth with dangerous levels of Energon, so they have to go organic beast mode to prevent bluescreens. The second moon around Earth is blown up (so that's where that went). The CG cartoon, that made numerous callbacks to Generation 1, lasted about three seasons.

### 2001-2005: DREAMWAVE PRODUCTIONS

Another decade, another comic series, this time by Dreamwave Productions. The Autobots defeated the Decepticons on Earth and returned to a Shockwave-ruled Cybertron. Lots of stuff happened as Dreamwave tried to make their universe the official one, but then they went bankrupt and most of their stories were left hanging.

### 2003 ONWARDS: G.I. JOE Crossovers

Because nothing is as cool as your favourite characters from one franchise appearing in another franchise, Hasbro constantly had Transformers appearing in their other properties, like *G.I. Joe*. One comic storyline had it that Cobra was responsible for reactivating the Transformers. In another, Cobra re-engineered the Transformers into Cobra vehicles.

### 2005 ONWARDS: IDW PUBLISHING

Mostly a self-contained universe, IDW Publishing released a bunch of limited series and one shots. Decepticons replace people with clones, Shockwave does a bunch of nasty things, and IDW tries to explain the mass displacement in the transformations that make the Transformers much smaller.

### 2000-2001: ROBOTS IN DISGUISE

Imported from Japan, *Robots In Disguise* was a short animated series of 39 episodes. It tries to tie the Beast Wars history into the Generation 1 universe, but ended up being regarded as a stand-alone universe.

### 2001-2006: THE UNICRON TRILOGY

Three series each with 52 episodes make up this trilogy. Armada involved the Autobots and Decepticons finding powerful Mini-Cons on Earth (think *Transformers* meets *Pokemon*, eew). Energon is set ten years later, and involves the Autobots stopping the Decepticons from resurrecting Unicron (big planet-eating Transformer from the Generation 1 movie). Cybertron, was pretty much its own thing and its own story, and ended up being mostly irrelevant.

### 2002-2006: TRANSFORMERS: WARRIORS

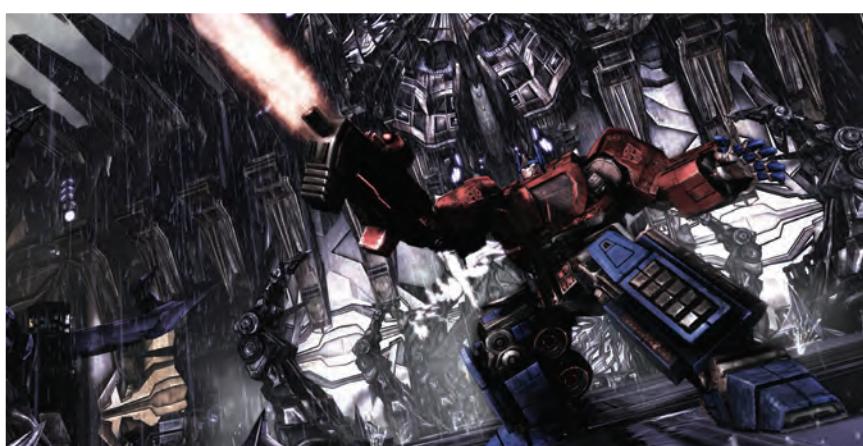
Generation 1, Beast Wars and Beast Machines all combined into one comic and expensive toy line.

### 2007-PRESENT: MICHAEL BAY

Big robots punching each other while Shia LeBouf tries to act. You've seen the movies (*Transformers* & *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*). They're pretty cool, and there's some comics associated with them.

### 2007-2009: TRANSFORMERS: ANIMATED

Cartoon Network ran this weird hyper-anime cartoon, where the Autobots play at being superheros, battling evil humans.



## Multiplayer Classes

The Scout is your standard lone-wolf setup, with a focus on quick movement at the cost of health and firepower. The Scientist is your team player, healing others and able to deploy sentry drones. The Leader can cast buffs on teammates and assist in other ways, while the Soldier is your backbone fighter with the most HP.



character for that class. Upgrades may improve abilities, carrying capacity, or give unique effects like dropping live grenades when you die. You unlock more weapons, abilities and upgrades as you level. You can create as many custom characters as you want to suit your needs, most people will probably have one per class so they can be any of the classes during a match. Each class has its own dedicated grenades, like the Scientist that throws healing 'nades. Maps are big, varied, some with tight corridors that are exhilarating to barrel through as a jet, others wide open for shelling someone as a tank.

## TALK: EXCESSIVE. TIME: LIMITED.

For over a year now, every day between five and six in the afternoon, High Moon shuts down and the entire company starts playing *Transformers: WFC*'s multiplayer, providing thousands of hours of playtesting and balance-fixing. When the game hits shelves it will arrive uncharacteristically balanced. Our time with two of the gametypes, Team Deathmatch and Conquest (capture and hold), left little to be desired. Granted, we desired split-screen co-op, but High Moon assured us that they tried but just couldn't get three Transformers, plus vehicle transformations, times two viewports, without a significant drop in framerate. For the sequel then? For now, having a *Transformers* game that doesn't suck robot ass, should suffice. **NAG**

## High Moon Studios

Formerly Sammy Entertainment, American videogame developer High Moon Studios started life as a part of Sierra Entertainment, turning independent in 2006. They were acquired by Vivendi Games, which is now owned by Activision Blizzard. The studio has about 100 employees and resides in San Diego, California. They've got a cool rare Japanese "match-em" puzzle arcade machine in their cafeteria. In 2005 the studio released *Darkwatch* (Xbox, PS2), a first-person shooter blend of Vampire-Horror and Western. Their critical success came from *The Bourne Conspiracy* (PS3, 360) in 2008, a third-person action/stealth game that followed the movies (but did not feature Matt Damon's likeness) based on Robert Ludlum's *The Bourne Identity* novels.



**Miktar Dracon**

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You are the shock treatment.

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## The Reviewers

After a hard long day riding the posse our band of cowboys settled in for some beans, mash and farting. See what we did there?

## Adam Liebman

They call him Doc, 'snake-oil salesman of the year' for three years running. Nobody knows why and nobody asks. He prefers dead people.



## Alex Jelagin

As a toothless grave robber, Alex spends his days looting graves and digging up bodies. He has a 3 week rule: she's still fresh enough for fun after 3 weeks under the sun.



## Chris Bistline

Tumbleweed Dickens is the name and poker is the game. Fondled by a stranger at a young age, Tumbleweed always keeps at least one hand near his crotch at all times.



## Dane Remendes

What happens when you let Mexican farm workers inbreed for too long. He hides a small hamster in his Sombrero for sexual reasons.



## Geoff Burrows

Also known as Barry the kid. He keeps getting Billy the Kid's mail due to some mix up at the post office that nobody can ever seem to fix.



## Michael James

Sheriff around these parts used to mean honour and dignity until Michael took over. He spends his days drunk and locked in his own jail cell because he can't find the keys.



## Miktar Dracon

After an embarrassing incident with a young sheep and a fistful of pig grease on a dull afternoon, the name Miktar Dracon is now spoken in hushed tones around children.



## Neo Sibeko

The only person in the Wild West to successfully liquid cool a Gatling gun – people say he went slightly mad in the wilds trying to turn sand into 'chips'.



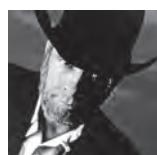
## Tarryn van der Byl

After spending 30 years peeling potatoes on old man Winston's farm, Tarryn finally cracked. They say the doctor stopped counting after removing the 7th potato from old man Winston's bottom.



## Walt Pretorius

Had the unfortunate luck of being killed by a falling cowboy, after enjoying a shot of whiskey at the local saloon he stepped into the street during a rooftop gun fight.



## Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

**Vital Info:** Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

**The Review:** These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

**Box Outs:** More good stuff. Just in a box.

**BioShock 2**

A man chooses... A slave obeys...

**GENRE:** First-Person Shooter

**DEVELOPER:** 2K Marin | **PUBLISHER:** 2K Games | **DISTRIBUTOR:** Microsoft | **WEBSITE:** www.bioshock2.com

**Score:** 18/20

**Genre and Platforms:** What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

**Game Name:** It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

**Screenshots and Captions:** A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart jokes...

**The Score Box:**

**Age Rating:** Lets see some ID, son

**Multiplayer Icons:** How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

**DRM:** Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

**Online Services:** Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

**Plus/Minus:** What we liked and didn't like, in convenient bullet-point format

**Bottom Line:** Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

**THE SCORE**

**Score:** Further simplifying the bottom line to a number out of 100

**Award:** See below for details

**18**

**ED'S CHOICE**

**MUST PLAY**

**PONIES**

**Editor's Choice Award**

If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.

**Must Play Award**

Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.

**Pony Award**

This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the worst garbage.

## Quick Hits



### COD: MODERN WARFARE 2 STIMULUS PACKAGE DLC

Quick, I've got only 250 words, and there's a nuke charging (from orbit). *Modern Warfare 2*, get it? The *Stimulus Pack* DLC, got it? It's good. Here's the mission intel:

Overgrown and Crash – You played them in *Call of Duty 4*? They're exactly the same. You didn't? Overgrown is all long sight lines, low scrub and forest, and pop-scoping campers like Michael. Crash is desert-urban QCB, tight corners, elevated sniping, and a central hotbox for stabbing and surprise grenade fun times – fast and brutal. New on the scene then, and first up it's Storm, a muted-palette, rain-drenched warehouse district not entirely unlike *CoD4's* Pipeline, and perfect for Sabotage with its mid- and long-ranges with some flanking corridors, and random-clutter cover. Next, it's Bailout, made of the same stuff as the single player campaign's Pennsylvania missions – shell-shocked suburban and multi-levelled, overlooking a broad, central tarmac expanse, with "happy cross fire party" spray-painted across it in invisible spray paint. It's the first world alternative to Favela, complete with a gym and treadmills. Finally, Salvage is a sort of frozen junkyard that plays out somewhere between Sub Base and *Gears of War 2's* Grind Yard. It's big, open, and while there's plenty of ground debris to duck around, there's pretty much nothing between you and the sky. Enjoy the Pavelows. If you're a *Modern Warfare 2* junkie, there's absolutely no reason for you not to rush out and get this right now. Highrise is so last season.

**Bottom line:** Light on numbers, big on content.



### SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING

SEGA's answer to *Mario Kart*. For all its obvious kiddie appeal, *S&SASR* actually manages to be pretty decent. With four-player split screen, well-designed and entertaining tracks, great cartoony visuals and even a couple of things to unlock, it may just hold your attention for longer than you're required to entertain your little sister and her friends while the adults talk about politics. It's not the deepest racer around, but then again, anything above basic gameplay for this type of game is considered gravy.

**Bottom line:** Good fun, great tracks and lots of bright flashy colours.

## Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.  
NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

### FINAL FANTASY XIII



75  
82  
82  
360

### BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



81  
88  
89  
PC

### JUST CAUSE 2



88  
81  
82  
360

### C&C 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT



75  
66  
65  
PC

### NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR



83  
82  
83  
PC

### PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

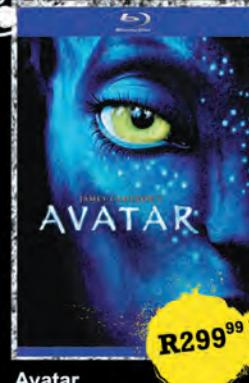


68  
39  
38  
360

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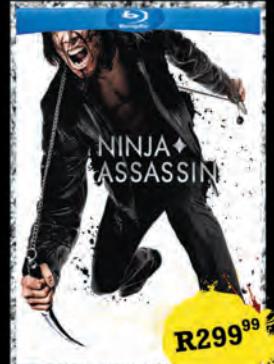
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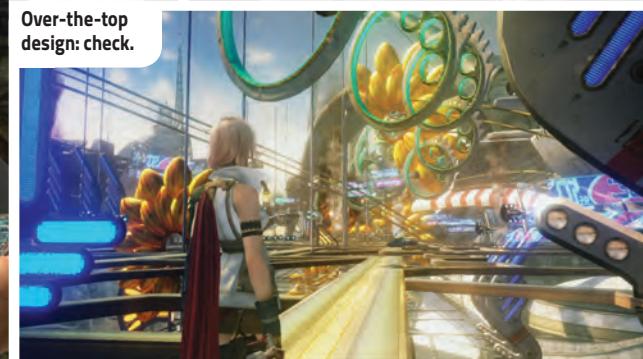
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Final Fantasy Ingredient Checklist:  
Bahamut: check.



## Final Fantasy XIII

Disproving the theory that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line

GENRE > JRPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

I HAVE A CONFESSION TO make: I've had an ongoing love affair for the past 23 years or so. Ever since the day I brought home that first clunky, chunky plastic cartridge and plugged it into my NES, I have been hopelessly, helplessly, head-over-heels in love with *Final Fantasy*. And over the years, as I've grown and matured, so has the series. The games just kept getting better and better. And then *Final Fantasy VII* came along, and my love for the series became complete.

But just like a real relationship, that flame can only burn so bright for so long. People change. Games change. And so, there I found myself, sitting in my favourite chair, controller in hand, staring at the TV as another *Final Fantasy XIII* cut scene played, and I wondered to myself, what was this game I was playing? Was this *Final Fantasy*? I don't know you anymore!

I mean it still looks like *Final Fantasy* – hell, it looks better than it ever has before. It's as if the series was having a mid-life crisis and got a boob job and bought a whole new wardrobe. It's drop-dead gorgeous, and I couldn't keep my eyes and hands off it. The colours were so bright and vibrant and the environments incredibly varied and detailed. And the creature designs! They looked like something that came from a James Cameron acid trip.

But yet, something was different. Something had changed. Something was wrong.

For starters, this new *Final Fantasy* is almost entirely linear. Previous games let you explore the world and go where you please. Not so in *XIII*. You get dropped into



a map at one end and pointed toward a yellow destination indicator at the other. You can't deviate from the path at all. The first 30 odd hours of the game go something like this: Walk a few steps. Fight a monster. Walk a few more steps. Watch a cut scene. Lather, rinse, repeat.

You did read that right. I said the **first** 30 hours. The game is incredibly long, which isn't unusual for a *Final Fantasy*, but the pacing is also extremely slow, only unlocking small chunks of the game every couple of hours. For example, you only start earning XP for your characters about three or four hours into the game. You can't change the configuration of your party until the 15- to 20-hour mark.

Then there's the battle system. In order to streamline combat in the game, Square developed a new auto-battle mode. You only



Corny dialogue: check.



A dude named Cid: check.



control your party leader while the other two members of your party are controlled by the AI, and by "control" I mean you mostly just tell him or her to "auto battle" and watch as the AI selects what it thinks are the best attacks. While we're on the subject of the party leader, I should mention that when he or she dies, the game is over. What? No one else knows how to use a Phoenix Down? What's the point of a three-member party if only one of them actually matters?

Did I mention this game was incredibly linear? And repetitive? Well, there's the weapon and accessory upgrade system, too. Basically you collect components by defeating enemies or opening treasure chests, then you apply them to your weapons, and the stats go up until they've maxed out. Every weapon in the game is either simply handed to you or is available to buy from the online store (there are no physical shops in the game). No searching, hunting or exploring required.

I began to get bored of this game. Bored of the relationship. How come we never do anything fun anymore? We used to fly airships all over the world, raise chocobos,

play Triple Triad into the wee hours of the morning! Now it seems all we do is fight monsters and watch cut scenes!

But I kept at it because it was so beautiful to look at, and I kept getting tempted by the little bits of new stuff the game kept dangling in front of me like a carrot on a stick.

And then finally, after 30 hours of play time, the game did open up a bit. I didn't have to follow a set path anymore! I still didn't have that airship, but at least I got to ride a chocobo! And the story started to come together, too. Also, while they were all a bit annoying at first, I started to like this rag-tag band of misfits and outcasts, who by some coincidence of fate, were thrown together against their will and forced to save the world. That part was still pure FF. They all had their places. They all fit. And the voice acting is actually quite good.

I also started to appreciate the battle system, particularly what the game calls the paradigm setup. Each character can learn skills in three of six different classes, and you get to configure different combinations of these classes and switch them around on the fly during a battle. For example, you might begin a battle with one character attacking the enemy, one casting protective spells on your allies and the third casting debuffs on the opponent, then when the moment is right, switch paradigms and go for an all-out assault. If you take too much damage, switch to a turtle mode while your tank character takes all the damage and the other two heal the party. It's simple, yet complex, allowing you to focus on the overall strategy of the battle rather than the minutia of it. You give your party a basic set of instructions, but they choose what the best action is at any given moment based on what they know of the enemy they're fighting. (If a monster is weak against fire, your characters automatically use fire-based attacks). The end results are incredibly fast paced, tactical battles. They don't require



Bad haircuts: check.



## Second Opinion

If you're a fan of the weird and often misunderstood world of JRPGs, there's little doubt that you've been as excited for the release of *FFXIII* as I was. There's just something about the *Final Fantasy* series that grips you and doesn't let go: maybe it's the expansive worlds, the deep and complex storylines, the painfully cute characters, or simply the gorgeous visuals and intense battles that hold an iron fist around your addiction to the series. Whatever it is that drew you into *Final Fantasy* to begin with, be prepared to have that magic shattered into a million pieces, scooped up again and rebuilt into a crude but effective imitation that sparkles in all the right places, but just doesn't do the job as well.

Fruity metaphors aside, here's the deal: *Final Fantasy XIII* is a blatantly linear, repetitive grind-fest wrapped up in a good story and sprinkled with interesting characters. There's also a side-order of incredible visuals. Thankfully, this grinding can actually be entertaining if you're capable of detaching your irritation glands for the duration of play (which you should be able to do; you're playing a JRPG for heaven's sake). This is mostly thanks to the combat system, which I may go as far as to say is the best system yet. It's heavily automated, and that's initially boring as hell, but as you progress through the game and unlock more stuff to do and powers to use, it becomes the engaging, nerve-wracking, tactical affair you've come to expect from the series.

So, what's the problem here? Well, you know how NPC

interaction, side-quests, exploration, and, oh I don't know – choice – has always played a major role in the series? Practically none of those features make it into *XIII*. There's no sprawling metropolis that begs discovery or dingy hideout filled with looping-animation-NPCs who say inane things to you at the press of a button. There are no hidden things, or interesting things, or really anything that you won't see by simply allowing yourself to be shoved through the story. That's not to say that the characters, battles and locations you encounter on this 60-hour straight line aren't interesting. Quite the contrary, thankfully; the only reason why *XIII* doesn't make me want to strangle myself in self-pity is the aforementioned combat system, classic *FF* storyline and – yes this warrants repetition – incredible visuals.

*FFXIII* will probably be one of those love/hate games that sit on your shelf for months while you make horrible remarks about it to your friends, only to see a spontaneous six-hour burst of play-time in the middle of the night because you realised that you actually enjoy every torturous second of it. That's right, despite all of the negativity pointing its pointy fingers at this poor title, it can be quite fun and engaging. That doesn't cancel the constant nagging feeling that you should be getting your airship "any second now, I'm sure of it", because there is no airship.

**Bottom line:** Dry those eyes and have some fun. Just don't expect the next *FFVII*.

Geoff Burrows

75

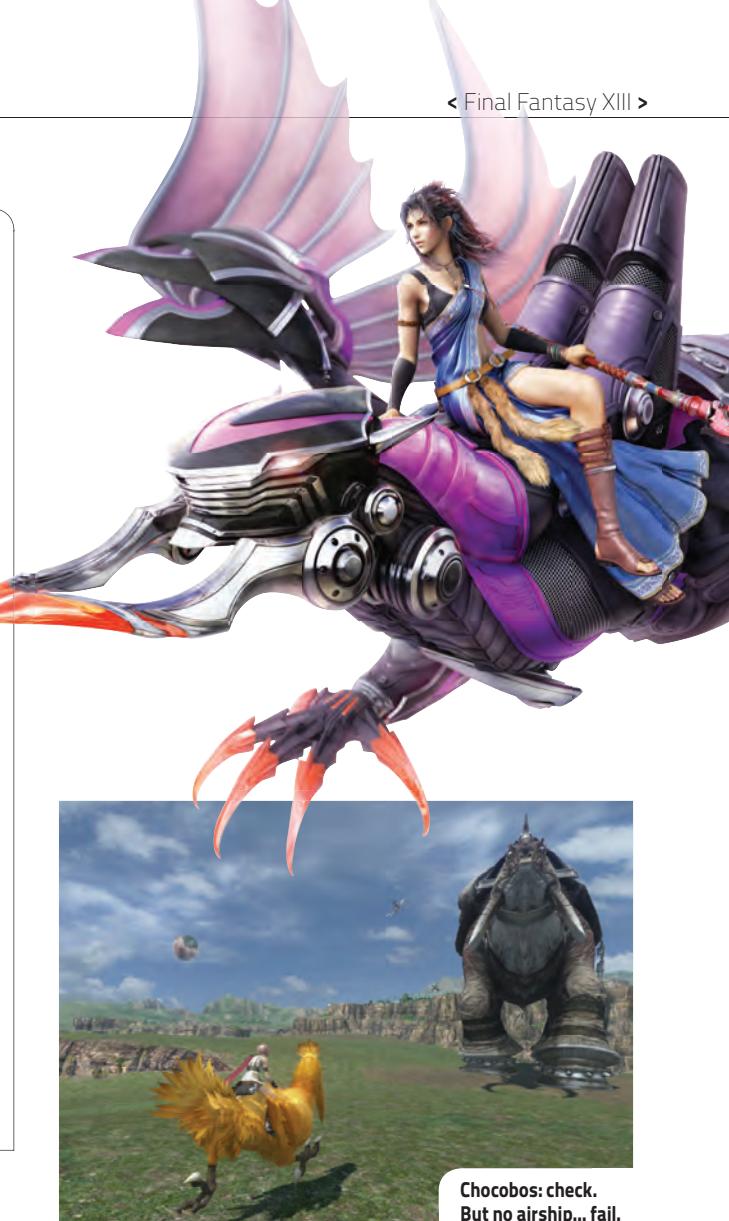


button-mashing, but still require a lot of attention, timing and intelligence. And they're just beautiful to watch.

But then after 60-something hours it was finally done, and it still just wasn't enough. There were so many things missing that have made *Final Fantasy* what it is that just can't be overlooked. The airship, the mini-games, the side quests, the hidden bosses.

Why? Was it the mass marketisation of the game? Were they dumbing it down for the mainstream? Was the whole linear approach an attempt to make the game feel safe, never leaving any question of what to do next? But if making it safe, easy and more attractive to newcomers to the series were the goals, then why does it take over 60 hours to play? It's going to lose those people out of sheer boredom, while at the same time alienating the core of its fan base by water-down the *FF* experience.

I still loved the game, enjoyed the time I spent with it. But I won't be playing it again, as I have with most of the other *FF* games.



Chocobos: check.  
But no airship... fail.

So maybe it's time I tried something new. Played some other games. You understand, *Final Fantasy*? Don't you? I still love you, but I'm afraid we've grown apart. I just don't know who you are anymore.

NAG  
Chris Bistline

## THE SCORE

12  
www.pegi.info



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>Plus  
+ Incredibly beautiful  
+ Fast-paced battle system  
+ Good voice acting

>Minus  
- Too linear  
- Shortage of side-quests  
- Over simplified

## &gt;Bottom Line

While *FFXIII* is fun to play and gorgeous to look at, it's missing the heart and soul of the *Final Fantasy* series

75



# GET TO WORK



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# Napoleon: Total War

European history has never been this enjoyable

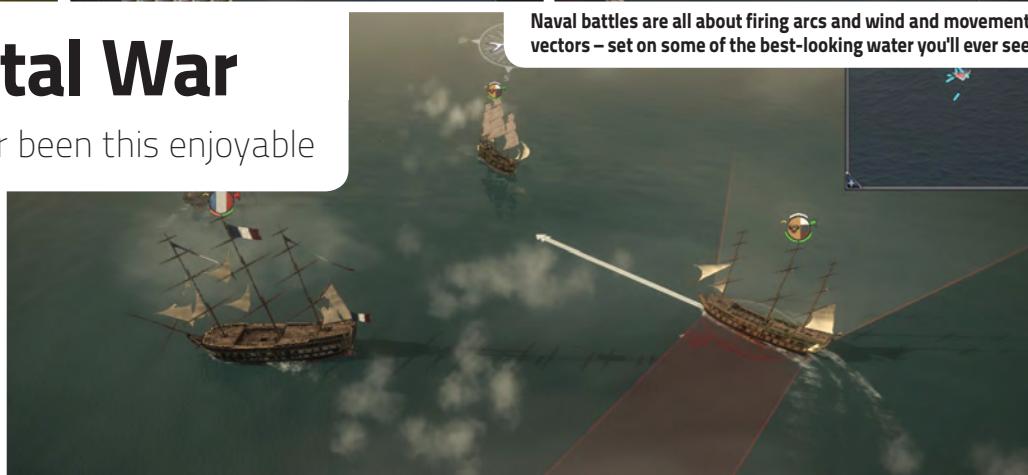
GENRE > Grand strategy

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**I MUST BE HONEST, WHEN** this one arrived, my first thought was "oh, great – yet another *Total War* game! Don't we have enough of those, already?" The previous title in the series, *Empire: Total War*, was released just under a year earlier, so this felt rather soon. However, it is not actually unjustified: *Empire* was released with some issues, and should you buy a copy of it today, you will find that Steam won't even let you play it until you've downloaded some 1.4GB of patches! So *Napoleon*'s release is not, actually, excessive – in fact, it is being hailed by many *Total War* fans as what *Empire* should have been like. Don't get me wrong: *Empire* is by no means a poor game – it just has its issues, pretty much all of which have been ironed out in *Napoleon*.

This new title benefits from the drastic technical enhancements introduced in *Empire*. For starters, the graphics in the campaign view are quite spruced up, while land battles are great-looking, and naval battles downright breathtakingly beautiful – you can watch the sailors going about their duties and climbing the exquisitely detailed rigging, or swimming for their lives as their ship sinks beneath the waves, after having watched its hull take damage and its rigging get shredded, while watching a first-rate ship-of-the-line fire a full broadside is quite something! To summarise, the graphics are definitely amazing, and about time too, as they had been getting quite dated. Sounds are fine, too, of course – seldom is that aspect screwed up in a game, these days.

But how does it play? Well, that's where this game really shines. For starters,



understand that if you are looking for action-packed thrills and spills, you may as well stop reading now and move on to the next review – this game is for those with patience. In fact, playing impatiently is actually likely to result in crushing defeat. The campaigns are challenging, to say the least, while the battles, until you start (many, many hours later) figuring them out, are fiendishly difficult. It is, however, possible to auto-resolve battles, which is probably a good way to go until you have learned the intricacies of running your empire. These include managing the construction of numerous cities, towns, and natural resource sites such as farms and mines, managing your technological research, managing the composition of your government, managing your taxes, managing your spies and other agents – in short: managing! The campaign map is where the strategy takes place, while the battles are where you get to flex your tactical muscles, directing various types of infantry, cavalry, and artillery.

The game offers a series of Napoleonic campaigns, as well as the ability to play against France. There are also collections of historical scenarios, and a variety of

multiplayer modes. One innovative such is the "drop in mode". This allows players who have it enabled to be occasionally drafted to represent opposing forces in other players' (also with the option enabled) campaign games, replacing the AI opponent – very slick!

**NAG**

**Alex Jelagin**

## THE SCORE

16

www.pegi.info



1



2-8



MUST PLAY



>Online services  
STEAM

### >Plus

- + Extremely challenging
- + Stunning graphics
- + Strategic and tactical depth

### >Minus

- Too difficult for some
- Narrow/specialised appeal

### >Bottom Line

History buffs and serious strategy fans that miss this one will do themselves a gross disservice.

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DVD + CD - GAME MP3 + ACCESSORIES  
For the Future

85

**YOUR WEAPON  
IS CHOICE...**

# ALPHA PROTOCOL

## THE ESPIONAGE RPG

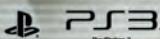
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# Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

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**NAG**

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# Assassin's Creed 2

Finally on the PC

GENRE > Third-person Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**T'S TAKEN A WHILE**, but Ubisoft have finally released *Assassin's Creed 2* for the PC. For those that haven't played it on console yet, this game continues the story of Desmond Miles, a descendant of a famous assassin who relives genetic memories through a machine called the Animus. But there is more than one assassin in Desmond's lineage, and this time he relives the life of Ezio Auditore, a Florentine assassin battling against the forces of the Templars in Renaissance Italy.

The developers at Ubisoft did everything right in this title, most notably addressing the problems that cropped up in the first title. *Assassin's Creed 2* is a slick, smooth product as a result, and will provide the player with many hours worth of missions and explorations in beautifully realised environments. The story is great, the action intense and the overall presentation magnificent. The overall dynamic has also been improved, with better movement and action sequences, as well as a host of new assassination techniques.

In addition to the expected elements, the player will now also be able to collect weapons, as well as partake in a low-brow management project within the title. *Assassin's Creed 2* offers so much to do and



experience that it's almost a no-brainer for third person action PC game fans.

This PC version, though, brings a little more to the table, in the form of two episodes that were previously offered as downloadable content for console users. On the other hand, the game also makes use of Ubisoft's controversial new DRM system, requiring the player to be persistently online while playing. Whether this DRM system will prevent you from playing this game is a matter of personal choice, but it really is a rather small issue when compared to the grand nature of this superb, engaging title.

NAG  
Walt Pretorius

## THE SCORE



www.pegi.info 1 N/A N/A  
Online services STEAM | Ubisoft DRM

>Plus  
+ Excellent story  
+ Great graphics  
+ Extra content

>Minus  
- Late release  
- DRM

>Bottom Line  
The brilliance that is *Assassin's Creed 2* finally arrives on the PC

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For the Future

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You can't see a damn thing man!



# Battlefield: Bad Company 2

No more Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders

GENRE > FPS

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**T**HIS IS A WEIRD one. The original *Bad Company* was released on the Xbox 360 and PS3 only. It was a new take on the *Battlefield* franchise with a spiffy new game engine, a wry sense of humour and plenty of slick action. The single player game was crazy with everything from destroying entire army bases to a crazy getaway in a golf cart. The multiplayer was an equally amazing experience. Now the sequel is here, and for the first time, PC gamers can get a taste of the magic of *Bad Company*.

The problem with magic is once you've seen how the trick works it's not that exciting anymore. *Bad Company 2* puts on one hell of a show. Buildings explode as helicopters crash into them, you'll take a wild quad bike ride while your buddy sits on the back, there's a lot of sniping, tons of weapons and toys, hidden secrets, bad guys and devastating super weapon technology. It's a smorgasbord of gaming awesomeness served alongside a dessert buffet of digital thrills. So, it's an easy 99% and we're all good then, right? Umm, hang on. There's a problem here. The game has all the same characters from the original, an exotic story and comes from the same development team but it's missing something. The humour that made the first game so enjoyable feels forced now, the innovative engine that allowed players to flatten the landscape and everything in it in the original feels tired and barren. The game also leans a little too heavily on an engine that chugs along and in places is unplayable at the maximum graphical settings on an 'average machine'. Annoyingly, some of the levels 'feature' snow or dust to add to the immersion – the stuff is everywhere and makes seeing enemies, your squad and even the ground difficult. It might look 'realistic' but it's no fun to play in – a little is fun, the whole level is yawn. The game also dishes

out cheap kills far too often. You'll fight your way through a patch of enemy fluff only to go down to a random rocket and end up reloading from the last checkpoint. It's all a little too sweet and sour for its own good and while you'll marvel at the explosions and excitement you'll curse and scream when you have to reload for the third time because you died because you couldn't see. Give these developers a new engine and a proper story and the next *Bad Company* will surely impress.

## BOTTOM LINE

The game has lost a lot of the magic of the original. To be fair it was from the console world, using an old engine and in a post-

*Modern Warfare 2* world. Perhaps all of this put a little too much pressure on the developers, resulting in a mad scramble to throw in a lot of glitz and glamour. The game does deliver the goods and will see you fighting through varied locations, commanding a tank and manning a mounted machinegun in a helicopter-getaway fight. The only problem is when you look a little closer, it's all fake and artificial and lacks that soul. *Bad Company 2* is the digital equivalent of a no-name action movie; there are plenty of muscles, guns and explosions but no character, depth and story. To add insult to injury, just as the game starts getting interesting it ends. Boo hiss.

## MULTIPLAYER

For some perspective, we've enlisted the help of Dane and Geoff to write a little about the multiplayer. The less popular opinion is that the popular game modes during the peak hours on the dedicated servers are always full – there's no intelligent queuing system, where as with *Modern Warfare 2* there's always a game available. The game is not up to standard technically, it's sluggish instead of crispy and feels clumsy instead of precise. The learning curve for newcomers is

high, and weapon balancing favours players of higher rank; it's a grind to rank up before you can start having fun. There are also campers who sit in tanks for whole games, and far too many snipers hiding in the bushes, making for dull play sessions. That all said, if you enjoyed *Battlefield 2* you might love this (but only because you're desperate for something new) and if you love *Modern Warfare 2* you probably won't play this for more than a few hours. **NAG**

**Michael James**



## Dane

Don't expect *Call of Duty* if you plan on rocking some *Bad Company 2*. If you expect to get the same experience that *CoD* provides, you're going to be disappointed – something which many players are quickly realising. *CoD* is fast paced and places a much heavier emphasis on individual player skill than *BFBC2* does. Instead, *BFBC2* is all about teamwork, working together cohesively to overcome a weaker enemy team, or coming up with the unique, cleverly devised tactics required to defeat a superior force. You can still be the hero and end up at the top of each match's scoreboard, but without a good team backing you up, you'll lose every match you play.

Forewarning aside, you should know that *BFBC2*'s multiplayer is awesome. It creates a battlefield so intense, so explosive and so chaotic that it's a bit daunting at first. If you take the time to get over this initial intimidation and learn to appreciate all the game's nuances, you may surprise yourself with how much you learn to love the game. The incredible audio, the visuals, the vehicles and the destructible terrain: these factors all blend together to create a living warzone that no other multiplayer game out there can accurately imitate. It has to be said, however, that there are some balancing issues. Unlike *CoD*, in which every unlockable weapon and perk is a trade off in some way, in *BFBC2* many of the unlocks give high-ranked players a significant advantage, which just gives new players yet another reason to feel ineffective and useless. It's definitely not without its problems – both in the technical and gameplay departments – but *BFBC2*'s multiplayer is thrilling, engaging and filled with epic moments that you won't easily find in other multiplayer games. Try it out, and give it a chance to grow on you. You may find yourself a new multiplayer obsession.

**Dane Remendes**



## Geoff

Let's face it: the only thing you really care about here is one question: "is it better than *CoD*?" The answer, in a word, is a "no," but I still have another 270 words to go, so let's have a look at the why and the what.

*BFBC2* is like all other *Battlefields* in that getting anything done requires teamwork. You can only be so useful as the lone wolf prowling behind enemy lines; it's when you've got your squad with you that you can really shine. Sure, you could rain down hell on the enemy, screaming and grunting in the manliest fashion you can muster, but you'll die a very quick and inconvenient death while the rest of your squad-mates look on in disappointment. On the other hand, if you actually take the time to work with your fellow soldiers; providing them with medical care, spotting enemies, laying down cover fire, repairing their vehicles or generally not getting yourself killed, you'll soon discover that the joy in this game doesn't just come from a kill/death ratio.

Of course, all of this careful, tactical malarkey comes with a price: pace. Where *CoD* is a non-stop adrenaline rush of death and chaos, *BF* feels a little more sedate. It's not exactly slow, but I've always felt that *CoD* strikes that fine balance of pace somewhere in the spread between a four-hour chess game and Russian roulette. *BFBC2* leans a little more towards the chess side.

It checks all the right boxes, looks and sounds fantastic and will no-doubt appeal to many people (and will probably live out its days on the local servers without too much attrition), but no matter how many shiny things you throw at us, we're still playing *MW2* more than anything else. Make of that what you will.

**Geoff Burrows**

## THE SCORE

**16**  
www.pegi.info



>**Online services**  
EA Online account

### >Plus

- + Squad-based multiplayer
- + Nice ideas
- + Dedicated servers

### >Minus

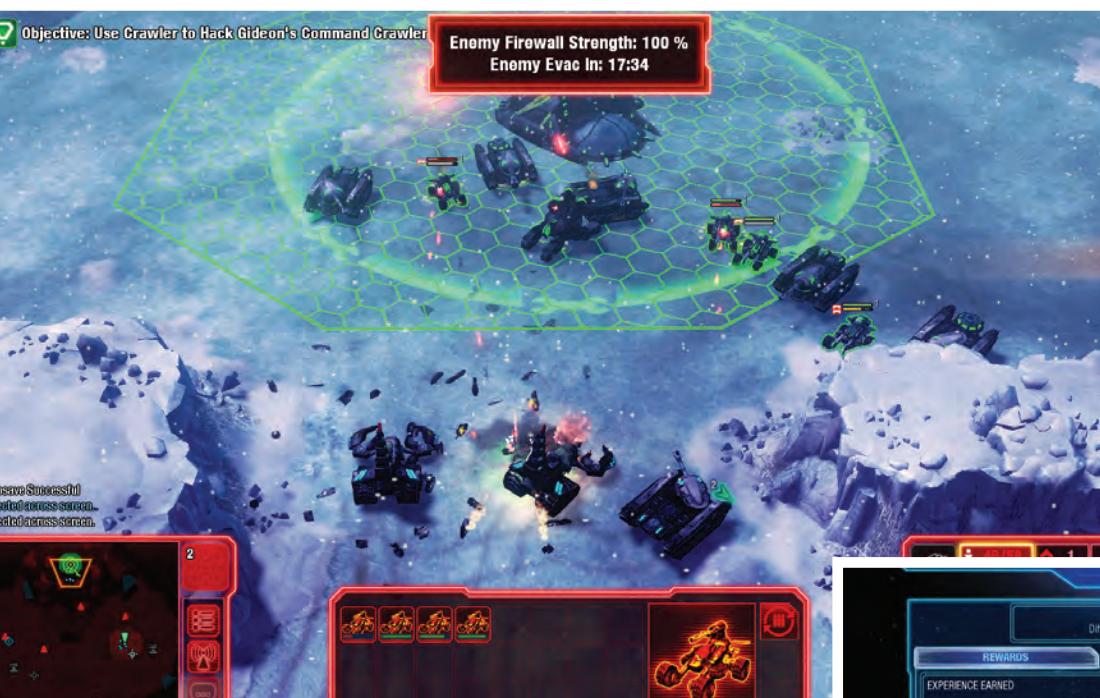
- Lifeless single player
- Technically inferior
- Dedicated servers

### >Bottom Line

A mixed bag of tricks that will probably do very well in the multiplayer arena and should still be around in December.

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For the Fun

**81**



## What's going on?

If you haven't followed the changes, here's a quick primer: You begin each mission with a Crawler, or MCV Mark VII, that can move throughout the map and deploy pretty much anywhere (although build-time bonuses apply if you're deployed in an Uplink Zone). From your Crawler, you'll produce all of your units. Units don't cost money to build, but rather time; there's also a population cap that's incredibly low for a C&C game. Research is handled through its own panel on the UI; nothing takes any time to research, but each item requires the expenditure of Upgrade Points which are earned by collecting Tiberium crystals that appear in predefined locations on the battlefield and returning them to a friendly Uplink Zone. Additionally, jumping up to the next tier of units and/or defensive buildings (which only the defence role can build) requires a larger expenditure of Upgrade Points.

## Command and Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight

Change is good

## GENRE &gt; RTS

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**A**S GAMERS, WE EXPECT evolution of gameplay mechanics, story, characters and visuals when it comes to sequels. The problem comes in when the change that we expect isn't evolutionary in the positive sense; it doesn't necessarily take a step back, but rather diverts to a completely different course that redefines the way a game is played. While this bold move works well in certain cases, like *Dawn of War 2*, *Resident Evil 4* and *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver*, it's not always a success; the abysmal *King's Quest 8* and *Ultima 9* spring to mind. *Command and Conquer 4* is the next game to take the stand against purely iterative sequels, by drastically changing a number of fundamental gameplay mechanics and subsequently making a whole lot of enemies on the way. But it's not all bad news.

Touted as the epic finale in the Tiberium Saga, *C&C4* takes place shortly after the events of *Kane's Wrath*. The war between NOD and GDI has been brought to an end by the unexpected peace treaty offered by Kane and his neat little device the Tacitus. The Scrin are nowhere to be seen, but another NOD faction, led by breakaway leader Gideon, is there to annoy both the GDI and NOD, although it's clear that little effort has gone into developing Gideon's forces as anything other than a different-coloured NOD player. Essentially, everything that *C&C3* and its expansion did for the series, *C&C4* undoes. The concept of factions has been reduced to the three roles – offence, defence and support – Tiberium harvesting is out, and the bulk of base construction, research and resource management has been trimmed



down to a streamlined but ultimately less rewarding system. The new system does much to speed up the pace, emphasise team play and ensure you're always contributing towards the battle, but none of these qualities are brought across to the single player campaign terribly well. The NOD campaign in particular struggles to do the system any justice, and feels more like a last-minute tacked-on job than anything else. As for the story and the delivery thereof, which the developers have shouted from the roofs will be more serious and gritty, it just ends up being an ineffectual part of the game that would be better off with a tongue in its cheek. Without said tongue, it's just a poorly-acted, poorly-scripted and cheesy (not the good kind, this time) experience.

If the single player campaign is like an old, sick, lame donkey that's too tired to continue, no matter what coercion its owner tries, the multiplayer is like a young, healthy-looking, springy-stepped mule that at least gives it its all, even if it is part ass. It's here that everything the developers did is given reason. *C&C* has been transformed into a fast-paced, action RPG without a care in the world, and it benefits from this transformation. That's not to say that this new take on things is better than *C&C3*, but it's a pleasant change that should, at the very least, draw in a new crowd of ADD-ridden couch gamers that don't like to feel left out of the action for longer than thirty seconds – the length of time it takes your Crawler to respawn should it be



## Second Opinion

## IT'S C&amp;C - THROUGH &amp; THROUGH!

Having been with *C&C* right from the first release in '95, and it being my all-time favourite game franchise, I was apprehensive about early information on *Tiberian Twilight's* design. Once I started playing, however, my misgivings quickly faded, and the more I played, the more I wanted to play – the mark of a game doing it right!

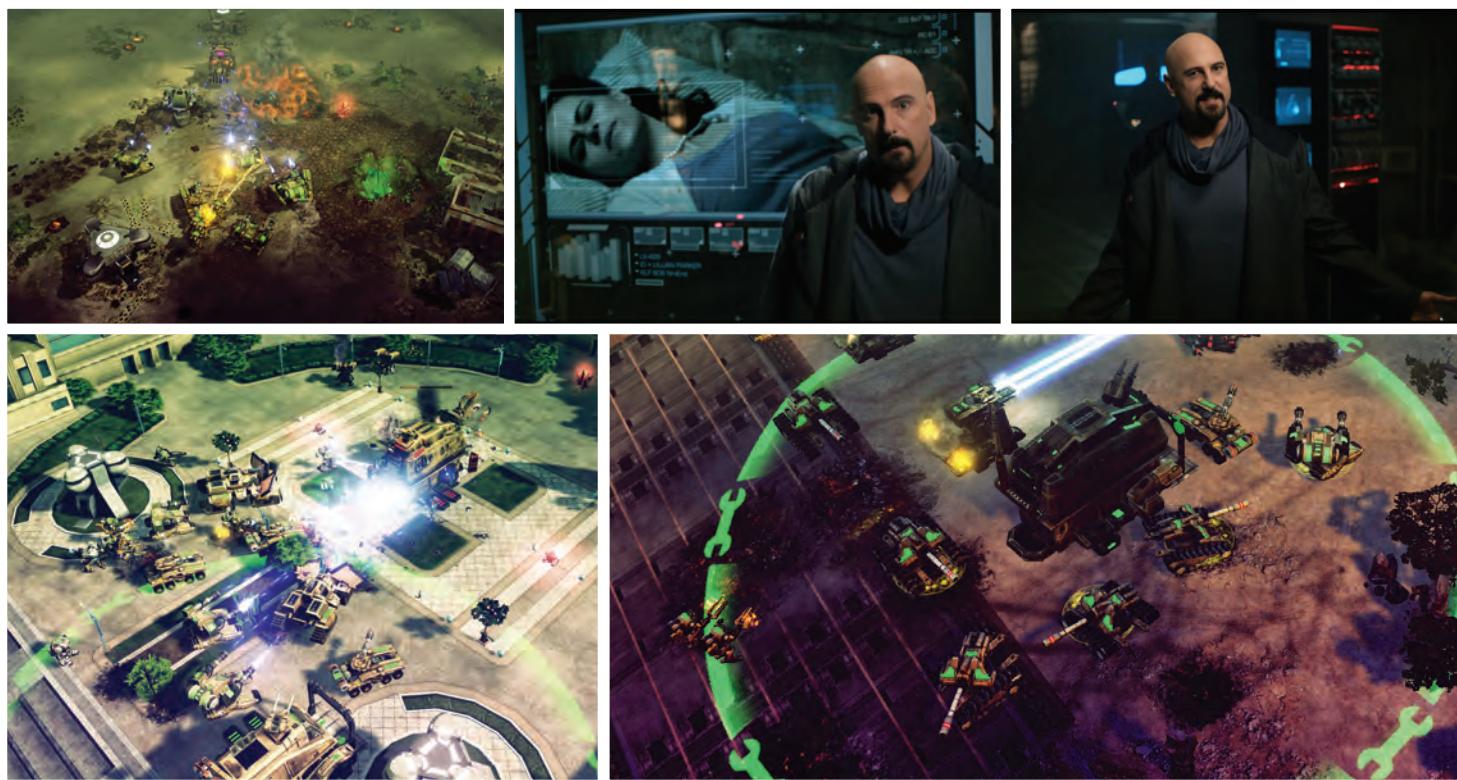
However, it isn't without its issues. My first complaint is about the length (or more precisely, lack thereof) of the single-player campaign. The total of 17 missions (about eight hours) is more what we'd expect from a single faction's campaign, not the whole shebang. My major complaint, however, is how sensitive the game is to Internet fluctuations. It is becoming accepted these days for games to demand always-on Internet; however, if your Internet connection stutters for even a second, your game progress is lost, and the game may even crash to desktop – unacceptable. This

is all-too-reminiscent of *C&C*'s infamous "game is out of sync" error. Hopefully, it will be fixed in an update – along with the annoying multiplayer lobby interface.

Other than the above, the game simply rocks, combining numerous successful elements from various previous *C&C* titles, yet doing something new, and doing it extremely well. The videos feature an interesting presentation style (along with the trademark cheesy acting); the story is good, even if short; the NOD soundtrack is stunning. And it looks so pretty! Multiplayer, however, is where this game truly shines. This is what it was made for: fast and furious, unrelenting team-based multiplayer. The game dynamic makes it inclusive – no one is ever eliminated and left sitting on the side-lines, everyone plays right till the end – this means a cheap tactic will very seldom decide a game. All this encourages newer players, and is simply more fun for everyone.

Alex Jelagin

84



destroyed in battle. With little reason to annihilate the enemy, players are instead tasked to capture and hold a number of control points (Tiberium Control Nodes). Hold the majority of the nodes and your team's overall score slowly increases, take too many losses in battle and a bit of your score gets knocked off. The result is a frantic grab for territory, neutral capture points and resources (Tiberium crystals and unit XP-granting Tiberium Cores), which isn't all that different from previous *C&Cs* if you think about it. You can still turtle (around a control point, for example), you can still adopt a fast-teching strategy and you can still attempt to steam-roll over your enemy with superior numbers, but everything is handled a little differently,

with an emphasis on front-line battles and a faster pace. Really the only thing you can't do now is rush, which many players (especially newer ones) will be grateful for.

*Command and Conquer 4* might not quite live up to its legacy, but it makes a number of changes that many will find enjoyable. Thankfully, *C&C3* is still an excellent game with a thriving online community, and is exactly the game that those who can't come to terms with *C&C4* should play instead. Yes, it sucks that *C&C4* isn't the perfect sequel, but we can only hope that EA learns from both the good and the bad that comes of this game to open up the next era of *C&C*. Now all we can do is sit and wait; we're hoping for a new *Generals*. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

## THE SCORE

16  
www.pegi.info



>Online services  
EA Account

Look Listen  
DOLBY DIGITAL  
HDMI ACCESSORIES  
For the Fun



>Plus

>Minus

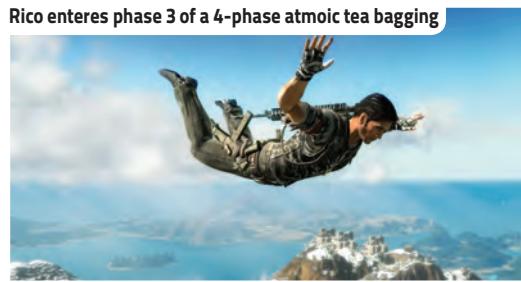
+ Multiplayer is fun

- Poor single player

## &gt;Bottom Line

It won't be for everyone, but *C&C4* certainly has its good points

75



## Just Cause 2

Causing chaos just for the hell of it

GENRE > Third-person Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**FOUR YEARS AFTER THE** release of the original game, Rico Rodriguez is back. He's still suave. He's still smooth. He still looks like the love child of James Bond and Antonio Banderas. And he's still causing chaos.

The story begins with Rico, who works for 'The Agency' being sent off to the small, Southeast Asian country of Panau. These islands have just fallen into the hands of an undesirable dictator. But there's more: Rico's former mentor, Tom Sheldon, has dropped off the radar, and Rico needs to find out if he is compromised, dead, or gone rogue. On top of that, Rico has an overall mandate to destabilise Panau's government through supporting rebel factions and causing general chaos on the islands.

It's not the deepest of stories, but it doesn't need to be. The story purely serves the function of tacking the activities the player undertakes together in a more or less believable fashion. The real aim of this game is to blow stuff up, stir up trouble and have lots of fun while doing so.

On arrival, Rico is armed with a PDA, a grappling hook and a stunt parachute. The hook can be used to scale buildings and hang from walls and ceilings, of course, but its uses extend far further than that, allowing for a great degree of player experimentation. As an example, a player can tether two vehicles together. Flying around in a helicopter that is 'sky-lifting' a car is fun and often useful. Tethering an enemy to a gas cylinder, shooting the cylinder and watching it drag the hapless bad-guy around the landscape is an endless source of amusement. The grappling hook can also be used as a primary tool in hijacking vehicles,



including aircraft, and can even be used to get around quickly.

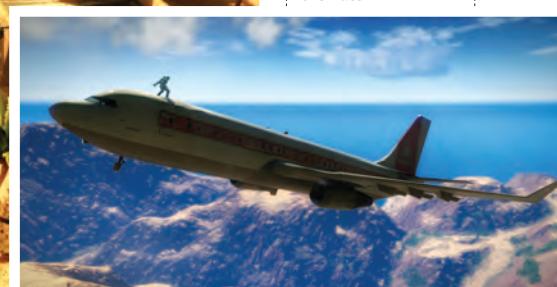
Combined with the stunt parachute, the grappling hook is even more fun. The player can perform fairly lengthy trips in this fashion, using the parachute as a vehicle and the grappling hook to sling-shot along. The grappling hook can even be used to pull enemies off of high perches, or drop explosive barrels on them from above. The possibilities are numerous.

Rico also has access to a good variety of upgradeable weapons and vehicles through a black market contact. These can be delivered to virtually any spot in Panau, for a price. Rico can also use the black market contact as a form of 'quick travel', getting extraction to



»

If you head over to the coordinates X:1272 Y:3670, be prepared to find one of the coolest Easter eggs ever: the entire island from the TV show *LOST* has been faithfully recreated and is available for you to explore. You'll need to fly a plane over the island; it'll then mysteriously burst into flames and crash-land on that fateful beach. Be sure to have a look around when you get there, and don't forget to find the hatch.



any point that he has visited and liberated. And, if cash is tight, Rico can use any vehicle in the game world, and pick up weapons and ammunition dropped by enemies. He can even unseat mounted guns and stride around, dealing destruction at a high cyclic rate.

In short, the developers have given the player a box full of toys and told them to go have fun. Sure, the agency and faction missions drive the story along, but there is so much more to do in this game than follow orders. Rico has free reign to cause as much trouble as he can, and he does so with stylish, impressive and often hilarious results.

The best part of the free roaming aspect of this game, though, stems from the fact that even simple stunts and spontaneous trouble-making lead towards the end goal – toppling the government of Panau. Everything that Rico does, from blowing up petrol stations to causing traffic accidents, add to the all important chaos rating that the player generates. This rating leads towards the destabilisation of the country. As more chaos is earned, the setting becomes more unsettled, even to the degree of seeing fire-fights between AI government and faction troops.

*Just Cause 2* is huge amounts of fun to play, and provides the player with a long experience – estimated at around 100 hours. The freeform nature of the title, combined with Hollywood-style action pieces, massive explosions, almost endless mayhem and a vast playground for all of that to take place in, make it a game that every action fan should be playing.

Regardless, all said and done, *Just Cause 2* is far from perfect. The game contains a few bugs that may necessitate reloading from time to time. The graphics showing the setting are great, but the characters are a little bland. The voice acting is, for the most part, nasty, with dialogue that ranges from feeling odd to being downright ridiculous. All of these are forgivable, though, when compared to the huge amounts of fun that the game has to offer.

Something that is a little less forgivable, though, is the checkpoint and save game

system. These are flawed, with save games relying on the checkpoint system for the most part, and sometimes not loading properly. The auto save is the best bet, for the most part. The checkpoint system works during missions, but the points themselves are spaced a little too far apart. And there's a good chance that Rico will die often, particularly at later stages of the game.

While dying during a mission means going back to a checkpoint that may be further away from the goal than the player might like, dying while messing around almost avoids punishing the player. Achievements gained at these times, like freeing settlements and military installations, are preserved. The player will be sent back to a spawn point, but the hard work won't be lost.

With so much to do, and so many options for experimentations and off-the-wall antics, *Just Cause 2* is a thrilling and often amusing experience that will prove enjoyable for almost everyone who loves third person action games. This title may not have been done perfectly, but it was done right. The amount of freedom that the game grants the player is astonishing, and it is certain to be one of those that players will keep going back to for ages to come. **NAG**

**Walt Pretorius**

## THE SCORE

**18**  
www.pegi.info



MUST PLAY

>**Plus**  
+ Lots of vehicles  
+ Lots of guns  
+ Lots of explosions

>**Minus**  
- Some poor graphics  
- A few bugs  
- Nasty voice acting

### >Bottom Line

*Just Cause 2* is just about the most fun you can have without breaking the law

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88

Just relax boss. You ready for that happy ending now?



## Yakuza 3

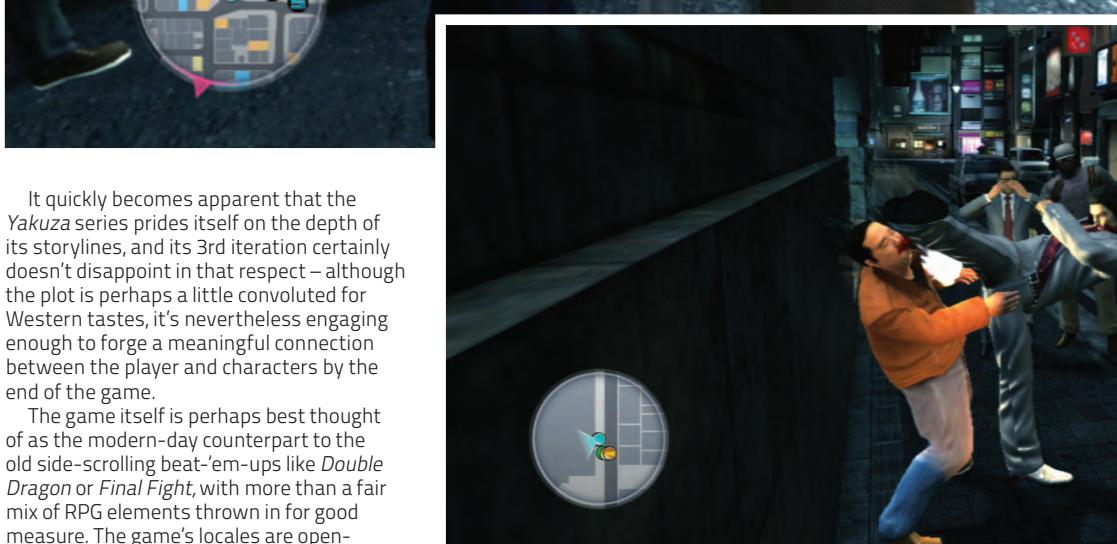
It's time to kick ass and, uh... eat sushi?

GENRE > RPG/Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**D**ESPITE ITS ALMOST UNPRECEDENTED success in the Japanese market, SEGA's Yakuza series has, up to now, enjoyed only a niche following in Western markets, thanks to tardy releases and shoddy marketing. Yakuza 3 doesn't entirely manage to buck this trend, with its Western release following almost a year after the title dropped in Japan, though it's a game packed full of content that's sure to satisfy existing Yakuza devotees and possibly even win over some new ones.

Like its predecessors, the protagonist of Yakuza 3 is troubled ex-gang member Kazuma, a man who's been on both the good and bad sides of some of the most powerful crime families in Japan, and who at one time even held the position of chairman of the Tojo clan. For those unfamiliar with the events of the previous two games in the series, narrated video recaps are available from the game's main menu. These lengthy cut-scenes do well to fill newcomers in on all the melodramatic goings-on that have already transpired in the Yakuza series timeline. The third game opens with Kazuma having finally walked away from gang life to open an orphanage in tropical Okinawa, where he plans to lead a simpler life. Things quickly become complicated, however, as the land on which he has retired gets caught up in a shady deal between the Yakuza and the corrupt government. News of the attempted assassination of the trusted friend that Kazuma left in charge of his clan soon reaches Okinawa, and Kaz is left with no choice but to return to the inner city in order to sort matters out personally.



It quickly becomes apparent that the Yakuza series prides itself on the depth of its storylines, and its 3rd iteration certainly doesn't disappoint in that respect – although the plot is perhaps a little convoluted for Western tastes, it's nevertheless engaging enough to forge a meaningful connection between the player and characters by the end of the game.

The game itself is perhaps best thought of as the modern-day counterpart to the old side-scrolling beat-'em-ups like *Double Dragon* or *Final Fight*, with more than a fair mix of RPG elements thrown in for good measure. The game's locales are open-



What the... I thought that was gum under my shoe!



ended sandbox environments, littered with restaurants, clubs, stores and arcades among others. In order to advance the plot, you'll primarily have to engage in fights (including some memorable boss battles), and as you wander around the city, you'll also be dragged into random conflicts, but when Kazuma's not pre-occupied busting heads, there's plenty to keep you busy around town. Not only is the bustling city remarkably interactive in that you can eat at the restaurants and buy from the stores, but the game gives you incentive to do so – there are well over a hundred side quests to complete for various rewards, as well as a plethora of mini-games to indulge in.

Of course, there is a lot of fighting to be done in Yakuza 3, and fortunately combat is another of the game's strong points. In spite of a rather useless "lock-on" feature and the occasional difficulty you might experience targeting foes, combat is for the most part an enjoyable experience in Yakuza 3. At the outset of the game, Kazuma can string basic weak and heavy attacks together in order to perform combos. As you progress, however, his repertoire of moves expands, and he gains access to increasingly brutal attacks. Once you've chained together enough hits to fill up Kazuma's "heat meter", he can then unleash devastating "finishing moves" on his opponents, at which time the camera swings in close to the action to capture the protagonist slamming an enemy's face into a sidewalk, or picking up one of his adversaries and tossing him against a lamp-post. Add a wide variety of weapons in to the mix (including purpose-built weapons that can be purchased and upgraded, as well as makeshift weapons like a bicycle standing on



the side of the street), and you're left with a combat system that only becomes tedious thanks to the sheer quantity of fights you're forced to engage in.

Visually, Yakuza 3 is impressive, notwithstanding that the game is, in fact, already a year old. The characters are well detailed, as are most of the environments, but it's the fight sequence animations that truly stand out, where each move is rendered with gut-wrenching fluidity that lends the combat a truly visceral feel. The game's visuals certainly aren't up to the standard of some other new-release games, but Yakuza 3 holds its own quite respectably.

Alas, Yakuza 3 is not without its caveats. Although purists will be glad to note that the voice acting is in Japanese, this also means that there's plenty of reading to do in Yakuza 3, as all the dialogue is conveyed either through subtitled cut-scenes or cumbersome text-boxes that interrupt the action. One gets the impression that many of the storyline's subtler nuances are probably lost in the translation, perhaps detracting from the entire soap-opera style plot that the series is renowned for. It's also worth bearing in mind that a fair portion of content has been cut from the game's Western release – a number of mini-games (like Shogi chess, Mah-jong, and a trivia challenge) have been removed, as well as a lengthy sub-mission involving hostess clubs. Since so much of the game's charm stems from its depiction of Japanese cities, it's a shame that some of these cultural idiosyncrasies were cut from the final release.

Though it might not be radically different from its predecessors, Yakuza 3 is a surprisingly well-rounded and enjoyable title that manages to blend free-flowing combat with quirky RPG elements, all tied together with a deep and engrossing storyline. Fans of the series will relish the latest instalment, though open-minded newcomers will find Yakuza 3 to be much more than just a simplistic brawler; it's an engaging and varied experience, one that, despite its flaws, is capable of offering hours of gaming enjoyment.

**NAG**

**Adam Liebman**

## THE SCORE

**18**  
www.pegi.info



>**Plus**  
+ So much to do  
+ Deep storyline  
+ Entertaining combat

>**Minus**  
- Some features missing  
- Limited mainstream appeal

Look & Listen  
DVD+CD+Games  
For the Family

**75**

### >Bottom Line

Almost a year after its Japanese release, Yakuza 3 hits Western markets, and despite a few cuts in content, it's still a very engaging experience.



# MotoGP 09/10

Another lap

**GENRE** > Motorcycle Racing

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**M**OTORCYCLE RACING GAMES (AT least) ones that are on tracks and not in mud tend to never quite feel right. Perhaps the fact that the player doesn't get the experience of actually balancing the bike has something to do with it. Maybe it's the fact that riding a bike gets the wind rushing past you, and the vulnerability of the rider adds to the adrenaline surge felt when completing a particularly tricky corner. Whatever the case may be, no game has ever captured the feel correctly. Car racing games come closer to the real thing, but bikes... nope.

The latest *MotoGP*, *MotoGP 09/10*, does a lot of things right, but that feeling still isn't there. This is largely due to a control scheme which is too arcade-like for its own good. Sure, the controls are a little more complex, thanks to a sensible splitting of front and back braking, but the rest of them are fairly bog standard. And the way the controls transfer to the vehicle is not breath-taking either. The bike just isn't twitchy enough, meaning that the player can pull things off that would have a real rider splattered across the tarmac. Lastly, the controls can be a little too sensitive in turning, meaning that the most minuscule movements of the left analogue stick will have the virtual rider flat on his side, with his knee scraping a furrow in the road surface.

A nice addition to the game is the intuitive racing line, much like the ones we have seen in a number of car racing titles. The line is crucial in motorcycle racing, and the one in this game is responsive and smart. Sadly the AI riders stick to it like glue (as they should). The problem is that they never seem to make



mistakes, and winning a race at even the easiest difficulty settings can be a chore. They also don't seem to respond to the player's rider much – it's almost like they assume he isn't there, just like a Gauteng car driver when he encounters a real motorcyclist.

The game allows the player to advance using an experience system, like a few car racing games employ. Good driving is rewarded, and bad driving is penalised – heavily. Perhaps too heavily, in fact, particularly when considering it takes a long time to get to the bigger bike classes, even when you're playing perfectly.

In short, *MotoGP 09/10* is a good game, and one that is quite enjoyable (although playing it might be considered a little masochistic at times.) It's not a perfect motorcycle racing simulation, though, because the handling just isn't right. The graphics are fairly nice, though, with detailed tracks and weather effects adding to the experience. It's a pity the bikes all sound a bit thin but the in-game sound track, which is

great, acts as a good distraction.

It's just about the best game in the series, when we get down to it, but the franchise still has a long way to go before it captures the true essence of bike riding.

**NAG**

Walt Pretorius

## THE SCORE

3	1 - 2	2 - 20	N/A
<a href="http://www.pegi.info">www.pegi.info</a>			

### >Plus

- + Long experience
- + Great soundtrack

### >Minus

- Arcade-like
- Not quite real

### >Bottom Line

A good attempt to capture the spirit of bike riding, but ultimately misses the mark

Look & Listen  
BIB-ES Family  
Art + Adventures  
For the Family

72

DEVELOPER > GSC Game World PUBLISHER > bitComposer Games GmbH  
 DISTRIBUTOR > Ster Kinekor Entertainment WEB > <http://cop.stalker-game.com>



# S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat

So close but yet so far

GENRE > First-person RPG

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**O**H GSC GAME WORLD, when will you learn? The S.T.A.L.K.E.R. series is now three years old; *Pripyat* being the third in the series, but it still suffers from the two biggest problems to plague the game since its inception: tons of glaring bugs, and a dauntingly-steep learning curve.

When I say buggy, I'm not kidding around: at least once an hour I'd discover an obvious, repeatable visual glitch ranging from people popping into view and dropping to the floor, to patrols of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.S. with creepy, synchronised animations, to guys walking through bunk beds, floating along the ground or spinning their heads around like they're possessed. It's disturbing and breaks immersion, and after three years you'd think they'd have it figured out by now.

With the rant out of the way, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat* is actually a very good game. Once you've blundered your way through the painful early-game learning curve (with no thanks to the manual and its awful localisation errors), you'll find the game to be incredibly rewarding thanks to its brutal difficulty. Getting anything done is a challenge, but the game makes sure that you always get something out of every effort you put in, and once you get used to the pace (which shifts at the blink of an eye between all-out warfare and dark, creepy survival-horror), you'll realise just how far this series has come.

There have been many improvements over previous games, and the world feels more alive, more interesting and more challenging than ever before, but it's tough to overlook the problems. They're not game-breaking, but they're too frequent to be written-off as a quaint side-effect of playing a foreign game. I can almost hear the developers say "just one more, give us a chance," and I hope they get that chance; *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* is closer than ever before to reaching its potential. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

## THE SCORE



>Online services GameSpy Comrade for online play

>Plus  
+ Right kind of challenge  
+ Looks great

>Minus  
- Buggy  
- Poor localisation

Look Listen  
PS3 - Game MP3 - Assessment  
For the Fans

80

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>Bottom Line

The best S.T.A.L.K.E.R. to date, but still suffers from the same problems as its predecessors.



## MX vs. ATV Reflex

It's a dirty job, but someone's has to do it

GENRE > Racing

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**I**T'S BEEN A COUPLE of years since we've seen a new release in Rainbow Studios' MX vs. ATV series; *Reflex* marks the franchise's first iteration since 2007, and the first title in the series to be developed specifically for seventh generation consoles. Although *Reflex* introduces some fairly significant changes to the MX vs. ATV formula, it's not radically different to its predecessors – fans of the series are likely to feel right at home with its latest outing, whilst those who weren't impressed with earlier titles probably won't be won over by this one.

*Reflex* features a number of game modes, including standard timed races, free ride events, trick challenges and checkpoint races. A number of different customisable vehicles are on offer, including not only the titular motocross bikes and ATVs, but also UTVs, sport trucks and buggies. As expected, the bigger vehicles offer advantages in terms of stability, but lack the personality of the smaller, more nimble vehicles.

New to the series is the concept of deformable terrain. As races progress, tracks are subject to wear and tear, meaning that new grooves might appear on a track surface, or mounds of dirt might form next to where racers have been kicking up mud. This changes the properties of the track, forcing players to compensate for the change in handling over the compromised racing surface. Of course, this is of greater importance when racing with a bike or ATV; larger vehicles like the sports trucks won't even notice a difference.

The trick system has also been overhauled, with tricks now mapped to the



right analog stick. Although tricks are easily performed, the way the game scores them seems to be a little haphazard – you'll find that on one run you might perform just a few average tricks and receive a ridiculously high score, whilst on the next you're awarded minimal points for a string of truly amazing stunts. It's not game-breaking, but it does detract from the fun of the whole experience.

The other significant change in *Reflex* is the separation of vehicle and rider control. Again applying only to the lighter vehicle classes, the left stick is now used to steer your vehicle while the right stick lets you shift your rider's weight, allowing you to lean into turns or to recover from a tricky landing without wiping out. It's a system that works well and quickly becomes second nature, offering players a better degree of control over their vehicles than the series ever has before.

Ultimately, *MX vs. ATV Reflex* represents another step forward for the series, albeit a relatively small one. The small refinements made to the controls and game dynamic make for a more engaging experience, though this is partially offset by a temperamental scoring system, and the sluggish frame rates and lengthy load times that plague the PS3 version of the game. It's a solid title that fans won't be disappointed with. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

### THE SCORE

<b>3</b> www.pegi.info					
1 - 2	2 - 12	N/A			

**>Plus**

- + Improved rider control
- + Deformable terrain

**>Minus**

- Sluggish performance
- More of the same

### Bottom Line

More of a refinement of the series rather than a complete overhaul, *Reflex* is a solid and fun title plagued by one or two flaws.

Look & Listen  
DVD + CD + Games MP3 + Accessories

68

# Dragon Age: Origins – Awakening

Epic, continued

GENRE > RPG

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

Less than three months after the release of every RPG fan's must-play *Dragon Age: Origins*, BioWare released a complete expansion pack (in addition to several DLC packs in the interim), and it lives up to the standards set by its parent game. The story takes place after the defeat of the Archdemon, as the Fereldan Grey Wardens are trying to rebuild their order. There are two basic ways to play: import a character from *Origins*, or create a new high-level character. Dialogue will vary according to which way you play – if you import, there will be references to you being the Champion of Ferelden, and NPCs carried over from the original will recognise you and react accordingly. If you create a new character, you will be unknown to those NPCs, and generally new to the area. As can be expected, *Awakening* provides new characters, new monsters, new puzzles, and a new story set in a new region of Thedas, but it also delivers a whole lot more. With character levels reaching new heights, there are now more spells and talents, some specifically for high levels. There are also new skills, including the Runecrafting skill that allows players to upgrade runes. There are two new specialisations for each class, and each character gains another specialisation slot at level 22. In addition to the to-be-



## THE SCORE

**18**

www.pegi.info



MUST PLAY



>Online services  
STEAM | BioWare Social Network

### >Plus

- + Tons of new content
- + Complete new story
- + New game mechanics

### >Minus

- Crawling with bugs

### >Bottom Line

Despite many bugs, this game delivers enough that's fresh to credibly expand one of the best games ever. If you play RPGs, play this!

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For the Family

85

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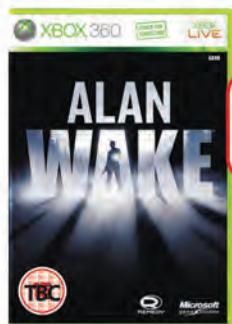


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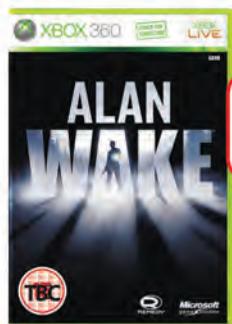
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## Resonance of Fate

Shoot first, ask questions later

### GENRE > RPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

**R**ELEASED IN EUROPE AND America just one week after *Final Fantasy XIII*, *Resonance of Fate* was never going to escape comparisons to Square Enix's juggernaut RPG. It's a shame, since the two games represent two very different perspectives on the role playing genre, and are arguably aimed at opposite ends of the market. Shunning genre norms of making players spend more time watching cut-scenes than they do actually fighting enemies, *Resonance of Fate* is vastly different to anything most gamers will have played before.

The game is set in a post-apocalyptic dystopia, a world rendered almost wholly uninhabitable by war and human greed. A large man-made tower named Basel offers the only breathable atmosphere remaining, and a new caste system is in place where society's more affluent members occupy Basel's upper tiers, whilst the indigent are relegated to its filth-laden lower levels. The game opens as Basel itself has begun to malfunction, and places you in control of a group of three young bounty hunters, who are initially occupied with seemingly random and unrelated quests as the story slowly pieces together. Although the plot itself manages to be quite intriguing, and is not without its share of well thought out twists, the way in which it's told feels altogether far too tacked-on and spartan, especially compared with other stalwarts of the genre.

What sets *Resonance of Fate* apart from other titles is its combat system. It's a blend of real-time and turn-based action which, to put things plainly, is infuriatingly



complicated. To adequately articulate all the subtleties and nuances of combat in this game would be impossible, but the basic gist of things is that each of your characters is able to run around and shoot at will, though they can at any time have their turn end abruptly if they're hit by an opponent. Instead of simply running-and-gunning, you're able to set waypoints for your characters in advance, and then engage in some bullet-time styled combat while your character is on the run. If you pick a path for one of your characters that intersects the other two, you can launch a devastating simultaneous attack with all three party members. The game offers a number of battle tutorials, each more confusing and less helpful than the last – ultimately, the only way to figure out how to successfully negotiate *Resonance of Fate*'s combat system is by diving headfirst into battles, and by being prepared to have your backside handed to you a good few times before things start to fall into place.

*Resonance of Fate* is a unique approach to the RPG genre where story-telling takes a backseat to combat. All told, the game offers more than 40 hours of playtime

to anyone patient enough to invest the requisite time to come to terms with its complex battle system, and that's not even taking into account all the available side-quests. If you don't mind being tossed in the deep end, you'll find that *Resonance of Fate* has the potential to be an engaging and compelling adventure, albeit an occasionally frustrating one.

**NAG**  
**Adam Liebman**

### THE SCORE



#### >Plus

- + Lengthy
- + Strong voice acting
- + Depth

#### >Minus

- Lacklustre storytelling
- Very complicated battle system

#### >Bottom Line

Focusing more on its gunplay than its storytelling, *Resonance of Fate* will test the ardour of RPG fans – those with enough patience are richly rewarded.

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DVD + CD + GAMES MP3 + ACCESSORIES  
For the Future

72

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# Superstars V8: The Next Challenge

One for the hardcore

GENRE > Racing

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**THERE ARE A GREAT** many racing games out there these days, so climbing to the top of the pile is a challenging matter. These games aren't just a matter of driving a virtual car around a track anymore – the vehicles need to feel and behave just right or hardcore enthusiasts aren't going to pay any attention to them at all, and the top spots in the genre tend to be dominated by franchises that have a long history backing them. The space for newcomers is a difficult one, all in all.

So when Milestone introduced *Superstars V8* in the middle of 2009, they were taking on quite a challenge. The game had a few problems, not least of which was its inability to appeal to more casual players. After all, any hardcore market is, by definition, smaller than a casual market, so getting casual players to buy a game is often critical to its success.

*Superstars V8: The Next Challenge* has addressed most of the issues that arose in the first game quite successfully, except for that niggling wider appeal problem. In short, hardcore gamers will appreciate this title far more than the average *Need for Speed* fan.

The game manages to capture the feel of the vehicles (which are now licensed, thankfully) quite well, and track elements certainly do affect handling in the way that they should. But the game lacks a lot of polish in many areas. The menus, for example, are a little frustrating to navigate, particularly when two saves occur right after each other (for some inexplicable reason the game does that) slow things down. The graphics are good, but they don't 'pop'; the cars are well modelled, as an example, but



the sleek gleam one would expect from the included vehicles is absent. The sound track is largely annoying, and the sounds that come from the cars are less than believable.

The AI has received a nice overhaul, and opponents will feel like they are trying hard to win, rather than just driving in prescribed manners. The AI drivers are smart and sly, and any advantage the player gives them will almost certainly be taken.

One of the biggest selling points to this game is the fact that it now features up to 16 players in online multiplayer sessions. However, finding a game can be a challenge. Perhaps not many people are playing the title, or maybe the online matching system is flawed.

*Superstars V8: The Next Challenge* is a good game, with some solid principles behind it. It's not a great game, though, and its limited appeal will prevent it from climbing the popularity charts. However, it's good to see that Milestone have learned

from their previous efforts. The game is a definite improvement on past attempts, meaning that the next *Superstars V8* game could be a serious contender in the race for the genre's podium positions.

**NAG**

Walt Pretorius

## THE SCORE

3					
www.pegi.info	1	2 - 16	N/A		

### >Plus

- + Solid AI
- + Nice handling

### >Minus

- Lacks polish
- Inaccessible

### >Bottom Line

A great attempt, but ultimately not set for a pole position

Look & Listen  
PC + PS3 + XBOX 360  
MP3 + ACCESSORIES

70

# Sometimes even the Ultimate Gaming Fan takes a break

## Music Break



The White Stripes  
Under Great White Northern  
Lights (CD & DVD)

R 159<sup>99</sup>

"Under Great White Northern Lights" is The White Stripes' first live album, and comes with a documentary film by Emmett Malloy that chronicles their 2007 tour of Canada, with live concert and offstage footage.

The CD is a great representation of the band in live performance, and it includes all the big songs that fans love ('Little Ghost', 'Ball And Biscuit', 'Fell In Love With A Girl', 'Seven Nation Army') and some lesser-known ones ('Black Math', 'The Union Forever', '300 MPH Torrential Outpour Blues'). The inclusion of their B-Side cover of Dolly Parton's 'Jolene' is as heartbreaking as always, and the unbelievable power and exciting live hunger is felt throughout, especially in tracks like 'Let's Shake Hands'.

All in all, this is an important document for both Jack and Meg and for the fans. They have now been around for over a decade and it is great to have something like this that highlights all that is good and right about the mighty White Stripes.



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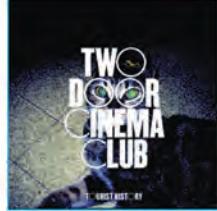
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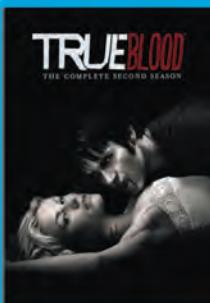
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Various (2CD)

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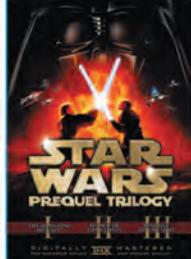


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For the Fans



# Prison Break: The Conspiracy

Things to do in Fox River when you're dead

GENRE > Stealth Action

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS

**I**T DOESN'T HAPPEN TOO often that games based on other intellectual properties are released 'after the fact.' Normally, the game is released at the same time as the movie, TV show or whatever else they base these things on. But, from time to time, a video game is made after the original work has completed its run. Take the *Godfather* games, for example – they came out decades after the films. It seems that these products are of a different breed, too, generally of a better quality than other games based on films and series.

*Prison Break: The Conspiracy* is also such a game, although it isn't one that is following long after the end of the *Prison Break* TV series. The series made it as far as four seasons and a movie before disappearing, so it most certainly has been completed. This particular game heads for the story told in the first season, when Michael Scofield gets himself arrested in order to help his brother escape from prison.

No, you don't get to play Michael Scofield. Instead, you take the part of Tom Paxton, an undercover agent working for the 'Company' – the people who were responsible for framing Scofield's brother in the first place. It is the player's job to find out why Scofield got arrested (seeing as how he had a squeaky clean record) which takes roughly five minutes to do. After that, it is up to the player to make sure that Scofield's brother goes to the electric chair. Which, if you've seen the series, you know won't happen. In fact, the game begins at the end of the story (such a popular technique these days) and then



tells the story as a retrospective. The thing is... Paxton is dead at the start of the game. Call me quirky, but playing a game that I know I will fail in from the word go doesn't have too much of an appeal for me.

The game basically demands that the player does various kinds of stealthy missions around Fox River Penitentiary, where the story is set. It is crammed with familiar faces, voices and visuals, making it a highly recognisable game for those who watched the series. The graphics, in terms of faces, are excellent, with the characters faithfully recreated. Unfortunately, they don't seem to cast shadows, and they all walk with the same steroid-victim-big-shoulder-swagger.

The controls are a little nasty, but the player can get used to them soon enough. The missions themselves are something else the player will get used to, because they are horribly repetitive. Add to this the fact that the AI enemies are myopic tunnel-vision sufferers, and all sense of reality and drama flies out the window. Even the fighting mini-games, which include weight lifting and getting all kinds of prison tattoos, do little

alleviate the monotony that creeps into this game before long.

Perhaps if this game had been released when *Prison Break* was still current it could have played on the series' popularity to bolster sales. As it stands, it is a mediocre reminder of a series that had a great first season (and pretty much sucked after that). **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

## THE SCORE

16  
www.pegi.info



### >Plus

- + Recognisable characters
- + Detailed environments

### >Minus

- Some weak animations
- Repetitive

Look & Listen  
BIB-ES Family Art + Adventure  
For the Family

### >Bottom Line

Monotonous and mediocre game based on a series that had one good season out of four

68

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# Aya

**M**EET THE LOVELY AYA, a zombie slaying bikini clad samurai cowgirl with her own swords (OMG! Does it get any better than this and no we aren't making this up).

Can you imagine... The zombie holocaust arrives on Tuesday (just after tea with avocado sandwiches) and you've escaped a crowded highway after just making it out of a crowded shopping mall. You're sure you must be all done with the zombie movie clichés when you run into Aya, hacking and slicing her way through a herd of zombies. It's like an angelic vision really – the only thing missing is a heavenly spot light and strawberry jam.

Naturally you rush to her side and fight alongside her – which is much harder than usual because she's wearing a bikini and is just so cooking an egg on a desert rock hot, did we mention the swords. But fight on you do, risking everything because you know if you make it out of this one alive she's going to be very grateful and might require a foot rub after spending the whole day on her feet. Sigh. Oh, just thought we'd mention that she's got a sister too.

Aya (and her sister Saki) are from *Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers* (Wii) and also from *Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad* (original Xbox). **NAG**

## Aya Q&A

> **What have you been up to?**

There was this one time when I went to the top of the Empire State building, I was in a tour group. I'm sure that's the highest I've been up to.

> **What will you be doing ten minutes from now?**

I have read that it's possible to travel to the future using a space vessel, extreme velocities and time dilation, but it just seems like a lot of trouble to find out what's going to happen ten minutes from now. Let's just wait and see shall we?  
[Ten minutes pass]

> **What is your favourite position?**

Queen to A1

> **What is the airspeed velocity of an unloaded swallow?**

That depends on my velocity and our eventual crossing speed and the weight of the swallow - I'm going to need more data here.

> **What 3 things do you have in your handbag?**

A pancake recipe from my sister Saki, a colour sample pad from the paint shop, a business card from a dead zombie that looked like Steven Segal.

> **Turn on?**

This is a little weird but I've always wanted to... oh no, I shouldn't get into this without my sister <giggles>.

> **Turn off?**

Snipers, campers and tubers.

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**8/10**

**91/100**

**"Incredible scale and utterly immersive"**

PC Format

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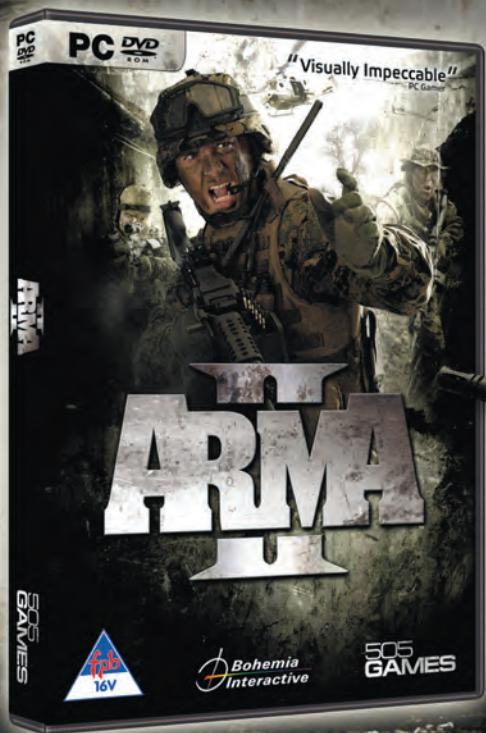
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# Red Dead Revolver

**I**F YOU DIDN'T OWN the original Xbox (and you probably didn't; the console barely touched our shores), or for some reason didn't own a PS2 during its heyday, you may have missed out on the spiritual prequel to the game proudly emblazoned on this month's cover. When Rockstar San Diego wasn't busy with endless *Midnight Club* titles, they dipped into their Scottish counterpart's wealth of knowledge from the *GTA* series, to produce *Red Dead Revolver*.

The game opens with a scene of a family reunion. Red's father returns back from a successful mining expedition in the late 1800s, only to be shot down by a couple of outlaws looking to make trouble. Still a youth, Red grabs the nearest pistol and takes revenge on the killer, but the rest flee before he can deal with them as well. The story follows Red as he grows up, turns into a bounty hunter and apparently embarks on a journey of vengeance, but for the most

part you'll just shoot people because their corpses bring in a good bounty.

Part arcade shooter, part free-roaming, and all action, *Revolver* sees the player take on the roles of multiple characters, ride horses and trains, engage a bullet-time mode called Deadeye, collect and upgrade weapons and perform all the tasks usually associated with the Wild West. The game is so chock-full of things to see and do (and shoot); it's no surprise that Rockstar decided that it's worth another bash in this generation of gaming.

Where *Redemption* is a purely free-roaming game, much like *GTA*, *Revolver* only really allows you to freely explore mission hub areas. From there, you'll be sent on various missions to take down some low-life scumbags and drag their corpses back for reward. The missions themselves are totally closed-in affairs that give you very little freedom, but the highly-scripted



"*Red Dead Revolver* may have aged a bit in terms of visuals, but the game itself is still extremely playable and offers a surprising amount of content..."



arcade feel means that the action doesn't stop once it gets going. Think of *WET*, but without all the ridiculous sliding around and excessive foul language.

As a bounty hunter, Red and his associates are rewarded cold hard cash for everything they do. As an extension of this, you're paid for targeted shots on enemy body parts, with multipliers coming into effect for consecutive kills. This money can then be used to buy new weapons between missions or at specific points in the game (these are expensive, once-off offers), or to buy common items like hats, flasks, shovels or ponchos that serve no purpose other than to unlock journal entries. There's also a multiplayer mode that has a few different objectives, like racing to reach the target bounty or facing off in a slow-motion duel at high noon.

*Red Dead Revolver* may have aged a bit in terms of visuals, but the game itself is still extremely playable and offers a surprising amount of content and character abilities for the player to experience. You'll have a tough time getting a copy locally for Xbox, but thankfully the game was available for the PS2 as well; regardless of how much effort you put in to get a copy, you won't be disappointed. **NAG**

# THROUGH LIGHT A LEGEND IS BORN.

A new era of displays begins with LG's brand new LED LCD monitor, W2486L. With its mega contrast ratio of 2,000,000:1 and ultra-fast response time, it delivers truly life-like picture quality in full HD resolution. Even when it's not on, its delicately slim exterior will please your eyes. Built with LG's eco-friendly technology, it consumes 42% less power, and is completely mercury-free. Experience the W2486L's dominating quality that nothing else can ever surpass. Available in 24 inches.



## LG LED LCD MONITOR LG W2486L

[www.lge.co.za](http://www.lge.co.za)

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# LED TVs get the 3D treatment

Samsung, LG roll out their 2010 lines

**SAMSUNG AND LG HAVE** both announced their 3D LED HD TV products. LG's INFINIA 3D line includes the LX9500, which will be available in May in 47- and 55-inch versions. Samsung's lineup boasts a 40-inch, 46-inch and 55-inch LED C7000 set, with their LED 8000 and 9000 series, LCD 750 series, and Plasma 7000/8000 series launching a bit later this year. Samsung has confirmed that their 40-inch LED TV set will cost between R18,000 and

R19,000.

Corrie Labuschagne, Samsung Electronics SA TV product manager, said that when you buy a 2010 Samsung 3D TV and 3D Blu-ray player or a home theatre system will get a 3D starter kit, which includes two pairs of 3D active glasses and a feature-length 3D Blu-ray of *Monsters vs Aliens*. If you want to buy additional 3D glasses, they will cost you between R800 and R1,000 per pair.

## Memristor technology unveiled

Researchers at HP's Information and Quantum Systems Lab recently showcased a memristor, which they claim is a new circuit that could replace the transistors used in all current processors. The memristor is a resistor with memory which can be used to store and process data simultaneously, essentially offering 10 times the storage and processing power of current chip architectures.

"Memristive devices could change the standard paradigm of computing by enabling calculations to be performed in the chips where data is stored rather than in a specialised central processing unit," said HP Senior Fellow R. Stanley Williams.

"Thus, we anticipate the ability to make more compact and power-efficient computing systems well into the future, even after it is no longer possible to make transistors smaller via the traditional Moore's Law approach."

Memristors use much less power than current transistors, and are immune from the cosmic radiation which causes occasional faults in RAM. HP said that the technology could be online within three years, and could eventually replace the transistors used in processors and screen displays.

**"With the ATI Radeon HD 5870 Eyefinity 6 Edition, PC users get the ultimate panoramic computing experience in one powerful card. By bridging the innovation in ATI Eyefinity technology with broad ecosystem support, AMD is revolutionizing the PC visual experience."**

**Matt Skynner, vice president and general manager, AMD Graphics Division.** The ATI Radeon HD 5870 Eyefinity 6 is the first graphics card capable of rendering in excess of 1 billion pixels per second.

**PayPal**



PayPal launches in SA

FNB is bringing PayPal to South Africa as part of its internet banking package. To make use of this service you will need to have an FNB account and be able to access the FNB online banking platform. You will also be required to open a registered South African PayPal account which will then be linked to your FNB account.

"We are especially pleased to make this announcement on the eve of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, as South Africans will be able to join the global eCommerce marketplace. Our agreement with PayPal also enables international businesses and individuals to transact with South African service providers via a secure and convenient payment service", says Michael Jordaan, FNB's Chief Executive Officer.

"The exclusive top up and withdraw service with PayPal allows South Africans to make payments and receive money internationally without sharing their financial or personal information," adds Jordaan.

## Did You Know?

**Microsoft's motion sensing Xbox 360 camera, Project Natal, will automatically scan a room to determine the size, and be able to detect movement within a range of up to 13 feet away.**

## Know Your Technology

**MSAA:** Multi Sample Anti-aliasing is a form of Anti-Aliasing that is most commonly used today. As opposed to FSAA or Super-Sampling AA, it is not possible to use this technique on just about any 3D image; however since MSAA works at a pixel level, where only the depth and stencil values of a pixel are sampled it is significantly faster than SSAA or FSAA. Various algorithms exist for MSAA but in general they vary the sample pattern or grid for the most optimum image.

**Deferred Shading:** A shading technique that has gained favour in recent years where small parts of the scene is rendered into intermediate buffers and then combined later to make up the completed scene. This method of shading has gained favour because it allows more complex lighting and other shader effects at a lower cost than traditional shading where shaded pixels are immediately written to the

framebuffer. This shading technique however also complicates Anti-Aliasing and many titles are unable to use MSAA when deferred shading is used.

**OpenGL:** Cross Platform API used for rendering 2D and 3D graphics much like Direct3D. Founded by SGI but now controlled by the Khronos group, OpenGL was the API of choice last century in hardware accelerated titles on the PC. OpenGL is rarely used these days on the PC platform for games. On the PC, specifically on the windows platform, OpenGL existed as an ICD (installable client driver) and API in one.

**Clock gating:** ICs that have additional circuitry used for turning off portions of the IC that need not be powered. This prevents the gates from changing state so the switching power is zero and no power is provided to those parts of the circuit.

## By the Numbers

# #46

Jon Peddie Research estimates 46% of the dollars spent in 2009 on gaming motivated PC hardware were directed toward what the firm calls the Enthusiast class. This is the top-of-the line stuff: boutique PCs, high-end processors and graphics cards, SSD's, specialized gaming mice, keyboards, speakers, monitors, etc.

## Hardware Scoring System

1

> Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.

2

> Hardware turns on/ installs but doesn't do much else.

3

> This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.

4

> Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.

5

> Middle of the road product that does not stand out from the competitors, performs and works exactly as advertised.

6

> Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.

7

> Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.

8

> Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.

9

> Excellent product, near perfect.

10

> The stuff of dreams, the best in the market par none.

## Hardware Awards



This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.



The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.

## The Mosh Pit



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### POLAROID U228

Mini external speakers are everywhere these days. The Polaroid 1.5" External USB2.0 speakers won't take up much space when plugged into your notebook, but will deliver good quality audio. **TBA**



### GARMIN NÜVI 1310

Now 25% slimmer, the nuvi 1310 is a must-have piece of kit for your car, to get you to the places you need to be. **R2,199**



### 9X9 EZDOWNLOADER

The EZdownloader can be used to download media files directly from the Internet. It also works as a Network Attached Storage device and can be accessed remotely via a web browser. **TBA**



## The Dream Machine



We have nothing,  
nadda, zip

**THIS MONTH WE'VE GOT**  
nothing. No shiny new Dream Machine-worthy stuff to blah on about. So to fill the space (because we can't just leave this block blank now), we'll be explaining the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool. Because Michael said we should.

According to Wikipedia, a mushroom and a toadstool are essentially the same thing. The term toadstool is used in storytelling when referring to poisonous or suspect mushrooms. That's not to say that a mushroom can't be poisonous. Or can it? Wait. What? Does that mean that the mushroom that Alice ate was a mushroom or a toadstool? Now we're confused.

Badger Badger Badger Badger  
Badger Badger Badger Badger  
Badger Badger Badger Badger  
Mushroom Mushroom.

## The Damage...

COMPONENT	PRICE
CASE	R2,597
PROCESSOR	R9,648
MOTHERBOARD	R5,000
MEMORY	R1,399
GRAPHICS	R7,881
STORAGE	R3,699
SOUND	R1,688
POWER	R4,200
COOLING	R2,507
DISPLAY	R3,577
HEADPHONES	R1,316
KEYBOARD	R2,001
MOUSE	R1,076
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>R46,589</b>

**NOTEBOOK**  
**ASUS ROG G51J-3D**  
[rog.asus.com](http://rog.asus.com)

**System Specs:**  
**CPU:** Intel Core i7 720M (1.6GHz)  
**RAM:** 4GB DDR3  
**Graphics:** NVIDIA GTX260M  
**HDD:** 2x 320GB SATA2  
**OS:** Windows 7 Home Premium  
**Mouse:** Razer Abyss  
**Extra:** NVIDIA 3D Vision pack



**CASE**  
**Cooler Master Cosmos S**  
[www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)



**PROCESSOR**  
**Intel Core i7 Extreme 975**  
[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



**MOTHERBOARD**  
**GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD7**  
[www.gigabyte.co.za](http://www.gigabyte.co.za)



**MEMORY**  
**OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3**  
[www.ocztechnology.com](http://www.ocztechnology.com)



**GRAPHICS**  
**ASUS EAH5970**  
[za.asus.com](http://za.asus.com)



**STORAGE**  
**Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB**  
[www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)



**SOUND**  
**ASUS Xonar Essence ST \***  
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# Tech Q&A

## STRANGE COMPUTER PROBLEMS

**From:** Exodus

**"HEY NEO AND THE** rest of the gang at NAG. I am having a strange problem that I have never heard of and am at a loss to explain. I have trawled the internet but cannot find a similar problem. My current computer is an Intel i7 920 with a MSI X58 Pro-E motherboard, 6GB DDR3 RAM and an Antec CP 850W PSU. My problem is that when I first startup my computer and it POSTs it only detects 4GB of RAM and no matter how many restarts I do it still only detects 4GB. Only after I have fully shutdown the computer and booted it up again will it detect all 6GB. I should also probably mention that when I shutdown I switch off the PSU and then unplug it. 4GB also normally results in a crash and physical memory dump or the Graphics card won't work properly. Once all 6GB are detected there is no problem at all. Any ideas or thoughts because I am at a loss."

**Neo:** You're probably in need of a BIOS update for your motherboard, I can't think of anything else that may be a problem unless you have one stick of RAM that's faulty. Your best bet is to try two sticks of RAM at a time mixing them in a different configuration to find out which is the offending DIMM if it's that at all. Do however check the MSI website for the latest BIOS for your motherboard.

## I NEED CONTROL

**From:** Jared Williamson

**"I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR** a program to control my fan speed on both my CPU and GPU. I have a Intel E1200 overclocked @ 1.92GHz, works like a dream. My 9800GT as well, but I tend to get those dips in performance most likely due to my ancient CPU. I have used

SpeedFan, but that says my fans are at 100% already. Any other program you can recommend? Perhaps one that can monitor the RPM like SpeedFan but where I can adjust the RPM myself instead of working with percentages. Next thing, I want to overclock my Graphics card, it is a MSI N9800GT MD1G. I used Windows XP and installed the drivers which allowed me to adjust these settings on the fly under display properties. I am now running Windows 7 Ultimate 64bit and cannot find these settings anywhere. Please advise. Great mag by the way... it has become my new addiction!"

**Neo:** Your best bet is to set your CPU fan speed setting manually in the BIOS, or even better, buy a two- or four-channel fan controller, which you can use to adjust your CPU fan speeds. SpeedFan is generally the best program you'll find, but you can also check out Gigabyte EasyTune which should support your motherboard and allow you to change fan speeds. Should it not, it's unlikely you can adjust your CPU fan speeds via software at all. As for your graphics card fan speeds, try MSI's Afterburner software, which works just fine in Windows 7.

## GPU ADVICE

**From:** Reinhardt Beetge

**"I COULD USE SOME ADVICE** on GPUs. I would like to know which NVIDIA graphics card I should get that is the same equivalent as a ATI HD5750 because you can't get it anywhere. I would really appreciate the help. P.S. Great magazine."

**Neo:** There isn't an NVIDIA equivalent to the 5750 as there aren't any DirectX11 mid-range parts from NVIDIA yet. These will only be around in July or August. A GeForce GTS 250 will be your best bet now.

## On the NAG Forums

### APRIL 2010 ISSUE

**From:** Tieron

**"THERE'S JUST ONE THING** that's really starting to irk me, and that's Neo. I know he knows a lot about hardware, his experience and knowledge is almost unmatched, BUT his nVidiotalitis (yep, you read it here first) is getting a bit too much for me. It's the first column of his I've read in a few months because he pissed me off before too, and it's just more of the same bullshit.

"Yes, ATI has better performance per rand, yes they hold the fastest-gfx-in-the-world crown, yes they were the first to implement DX11 by 4 or 5 months, yes they got their cards and new manufacturing process sorted out ages before the competition, but actually it all means nothing, 'cause they don't have PhysX and CUDA and all those other really awesome and super powerful technologies that nobody actually uses besides two dudes in Sweden trying to decipher the odds of a meteor hitting the earth and starting a galaxy wide game of pinball. Seriously, since when have graphics cards been about gaming performance? Pfffft!"

**Neo:** I appreciate your criticisms of what I write in an opinion piece. They are always welcome, however there are some things you are obviously not aware of which is why you are able to make statements like the above. Unlike you, I have to know much more about the technologies and industries you take for granted. In fact I have to know enough to not be a fan through the lack of information but the appreciation of engineering at a more significant level than what I can write about in the magazine.

What you think is "two dudes in Sweden trying to decipher the odds of a meteor...." is actually the technology that brought visuals to movies such as AVATAR, UP, 2012 and many other movies. This very same computing technology you seem to think is irrelevant is what powers many super computers in many universities, and businesses. It's what powers medical research and many other areas of computing which you are simply not aware of.

What you must understand is that R&D costs money, hundreds of millions of dollars, and in NVIDIA's case more than a Billion dollars in R&D alone. The money to fund this research comes from all these computing spheres which you are unaware of. To continue to serve these markets, investments into technologies relevant to them must be made.

The ability to natively run C++, C and FORTRAN code on the GPU (a first) is very important to these markets. So while it is true that NVIDIA and ATI do compete in consumer graphics cards, one company does much more than the other, because they are in more sectors of business.

NVIDIA is a Visual computing company, not a graphics card company, hence the GPU Technology Conference, numerous SIGGRAPH paper submissions (more than any other in recent history), and any other technologies not directly related to your Far Cry frame rate. Pioneering C for Graphics (Cg+) made it possible to use shading languages which you now take for granted in APIs like DirectX9 and higher (HLSL is co-written by NVIDIA and based directly on Cg+, same applies to GLSL).

Basically there's much more to the technology and its applications than just computer games. I am more interested in the technology as a whole than any single application of it. I admire the pioneering of GPU computing (Quadro, Tesla, Cuda applications) and what has been achieved with it. Had it been ATI that was at the forefront of these technologies I would speak highly of them and in the same way.

My engagement and appreciation for computing technologies is significantly different to yours and I write from that point of view in a personal capacity.

You're more than welcome to disagree with me, however if anything I have said is untrue please call me out on it so we can have an informed and balanced discussion about it. I would certainly appreciate the opportunity to learn :)



If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get).

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# Epson EH-DM2

## ROCK AND ROLL

With all of its built-in functions, the EH-DM2 projector is perfect for dragging along to a friend's house for movie night, gaming or sporting events. It even has a built-in handle and comes with a carry pouch; they really do expect you to transport this device, and at 3.8kg, it's hardly a pain to lug around. To make setting up even quicker and easier, the front stands are adjustable in height, although you can only tilt the device to point further up; if you need it to point further down, then a stack of books might be in order.

## INPUT AND OUTPUT

One of the coolest features of the EH-DM2 is its built-in DVD player. This, coupled with its built-in 8W speakers (they're not the best, but their inclusion is a nice touch nonetheless) means that you can have your very own home cinema up and running in only a few minutes. It also has a single USB port located at the back which allows you to connect a portable hard drive, flash drive or even camera loaded with DivX videos, MP3s, WMAs or photos. Other inputs include Component, Composite and VGA, although the only outputs are 3.5mm stereo or Digital Coax for the audio, which might be a limiting factor for those expecting standard RCA stereo outputs. Sadly there's no HDMI port, but the higher-end DM3 does offer this functionality, as well as other improved specs.



## WHAT IS 3LCD?

You may not be familiar with the term, but 3LCD technology is present in more than half the mainstream digital projectors in the world. It was first pioneered by Epson in 1988, and the company still owns the technology, but shares it with other manufacturers such as Sony, Panasonic and Samsung. The idea behind 3LCD is this: project the image in a white light, which passes through three LCDs, each one a different colour. The light is split before the process begins and gathered back up before it's beamed to the projection surface. While the science behind it all is a little beyond the scope of this page (and, indeed, this writer), we're told that it's a much better way of doing things than 1-chip DLP. Ultimately, the proof is in the projecting, and while we weren't particularly blown away by the quality of the projection otherwise, the colours themselves were vivid and had decent contrast. So there you go.

## MODUS OPERANDI

No matter the operating environment, the EH-DM2 will endeavour to give you the right video and audio quality. Four colour modes, Dynamic, Living Room, Theatre and Game are there to help you along, as well as settings for brightness, colour saturation, contrast, colour temperature and sharpness. In the audio department, you can choose from a selection of pre-programmed equaliser settings such as Concert, Drama, Classic and Rock.

## Specifications

<b>Maximum resolution:</b>	480p (854x480)
<b>Brightness:</b>	1200 ANSI lumens
<b>Image size:</b>	30"-300"
<b>F-number:</b>	1.44
<b>Focal length:</b>	16.6"
<b>Throw ratio:</b>	80" @ 2.4-3.2m
<b>Lamp type:</b>	140W UHE (E-TORL)
<b>Lamp hours:</b>	2,000-3,000

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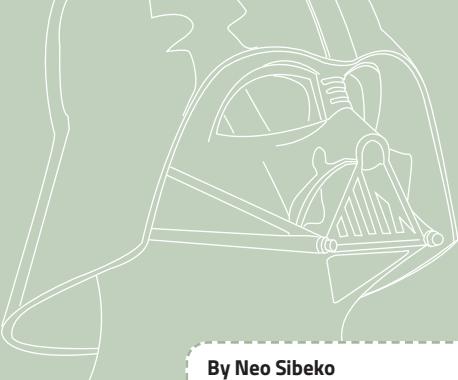


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# Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

## Let's not be n00bs

**N**O END USER SHOULD have to understand or have it explained to them how difficult a product is to manufacture and how or why they must understand delays and other such things. No business should be explaining this to its end users, because if a product is just that difficult or that complicated to make, then it shouldn't be made at all. If it needs to be explained then it's already a failed product.

This applies to almost any and every product that can be sold. However if the customers are claiming to be more than just the Joe soaps who are looking for a product and in fact they are interested in the mechanics that make the products viable or possible, a better understanding of that technology and market is needed. This in particular applies to enthusiasts that frequent technology forums and the like where endless debates (usually around the lack of knowledge and numbers) make their rounds in particular before the release of a product.

Recently this has been the issue with the GeForce GTX400 series of graphics cards which have been met with some harsh criticisms (rightfully so in many cases) and some adoration in others. Bottom line is we must level criticisms and concerns at a product based on what is real and not perceived. The dangers of dealing with untruths are limitless because it is really an exercise in creative thinking more than detailed and objective analysis of the product.

The process that goes into designing any ASIC or complex IC for that matter is not a trivial task. In fact there are many steps and procedures which we as the buying public do not have access to. Besides the technology and engineering limitations and challenges that there are, there are financial and other resource constraints which almost always affect the products in question negatively. At the end of the day, every business is in the business of making money above all else.

In the case of graphics adapters especially over the last five years or so, investments in the GPUs have increased substantially. In fact, if you look at a GeForce 256 GPU from 1999 built with around 15 million gates and on a .18micron Node, such a GPU could not have cost anything close to \$100M USD, however fast forward to now in 2010, where the GF100 core's R&D is \$1BN USD at the very least. The problem with this is that there isn't a market for GPU's that's exploded by a factor of 10, because by and large GPUs are still seen as gaming hardware. While the gaming industry has grown to massive proportions, the market that was there that funded the original 100 Million dollar part 10 years ago has largely stayed the same, or at best has only trebled in size if we are being optimistic.

With that said the complexity that we are now dealing with not only in terms of complex logic but sheer gate density is significantly increased today over what it was 10 years ago. The same GEFORCE 256 card that was selling for \$499 at the turn of the century has been replaced with a part that is roughly 200X denser, with a node that is only 4.5X smaller but one that still needs to sell at the same price point. In essence our ambitions far exceed the rate at which our technology progresses. What does this all mean?

It means that there was no possible way for NVIDIA to make a core with 3.2Billion gates at the same process node as their competitor but keep the same power draw and thermal envelope. Logic should dictate to anyone remotely familiar with the technology that for every gate you add, the amount of heat increases by a specific amount. With 1.1 Billion gates more than what the competition is working with, there's no way

*"In essence our ambitions far exceed the rate at which our technology progresses. What does this all mean?"*

the GTX400 series could have been anything but hot. This is not a short coming of the manufacturer, but the limitations of the process node from TSMC. Even in TSMC's case, there's not much the company can do to prevent this situation as these are engineering limitations.

I would have wanted to go into the basics of manufacturing any GPU, from the design process, to figuring out the thermal, physical and financial limitations but there's too much for it to cover in an opinion piece. So I'll just have to leave it at, "it's a lot more complicated than it seems"

So it is fair and is just that we question why NVIDIA decided to design such a large core knowing the limitations that we have today. That the graphics card is far too hot and subsequently has a load fan are fair criticisms. However these are not by choice and they are not a reflection of the so called "bad or flawed design" but questionable leadership at one level or more. Bottom line is, we should always remain objective and to be objective means we need a better understanding of what we are dealing with and as such, we should read more and talk less on the many forums. So when we do express our opinions they have some thought behind them. **NAG**

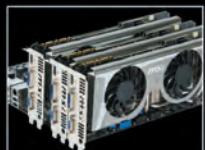
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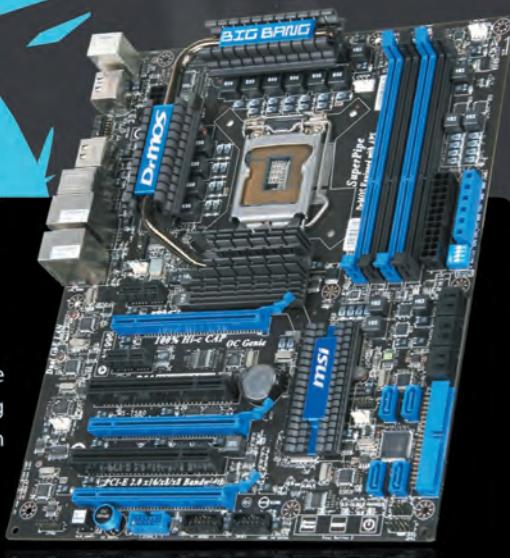
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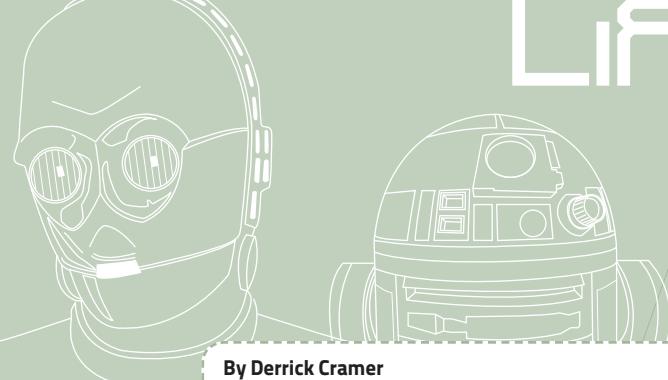


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# Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

## All for one, mostly

**M**ODERN HARDWARE, PARTICULARLY CELLPHONES, is supposed to do it all; cater to our every whim whether it be the need for a GPS while traveling, a camera to capture that special moment, or a media player to keep us entertained. The thing is though, while the cellphone can do all of this, it can't do any of it well.

Let's start with the GPS shall we. These are often slow with a relatively small screen area and sub-standard screen visibility. Not only that, if you want voice-guided navigation you have to pay for it! Did we mention running the GPS for anything longer than five minutes kills your battery? Then there is A-GPS support which goes through airtime faster than a 16-year-old girl hoping to win a trip to the Eclipse premier. A dedicated GPS, even the entry-level ones from Garmin and Tom Tom, have great screen visibility, good battery life, come with a car charger, lock on to satellites quicker than a phone without spending your life savings on A-GPS, give you free voice-guided navigation, and often have a more comprehensive mapping system. So why would you bother with an all-in-one solution when a dedicated entry-level unit will set you back around R900?

Moving on to my pet hate, the cellphone camera. Their image quality is totally rubbish, they are extremely limited when it comes to optical zoom, have next to no aperture settings, struggle in the dark, and if they're lucky to have a flash, it's mostly rubbish. Oh, and if you'd like anything more than 5MP resolution, you'll end up paying, a lot. Now I don't expect to get the same image quality or features from my phone as I do from my Canon 450D DSLR costing far more, but honestly when a "point-and-click" sporting 8MP, decent optical zoom, manual settings for shutter speed and aperture outperforms it, retailing for R1,000, there really is no contest.

Then finally, music. I will admit phones do better in this category than in earlier ones, but not by much. Sound quality is for the most part on par with a number of iPods or such like devices, but where the phone is let down is in sound reproduction quality. Even the best external speakers phones have to offer produce no bass, are tinny in the high range, and the mid range sounds are one messy lump. Size is no excuse as many of you will be familiar with Shox portable speakers, tiny yet potent. These paired with an iPod or like device will sound many times better than any phone speaker ever could. As for the bundled earphones, you get two types and two types only.

The first type is limited to your phone type, making use of the generic Nokia/Samsung/LG/etc connector and tend to be average all round. Then you get the earphones that come with a standard 3.5mm. These are rubbish and are meant to be replaced with better quality earphones, the whole point of shipping the phone with a standard 3.5mm jack. So a generic dedicated music player, decent earphones and a Shox, there's another R1,000 spent.

So what really is the point here? Well yes, all-in-one phone devices are easier to carry around than four separate ones (as you'd still need a phone capable of

*"This is very much like my view on gaming laptops – if you're willing to accept less for more, by all means go for the all-in-one portable device, however if it leaves you wanting, there are alternatives out there."*

making calls, SMSing and the occasional MMS) and for this portability you have to compromise on quality. However, I don't think having all these devices is an issue. The GPS will more than likely stay in your car 24/7, no need to carry that one around with you all day. As for the camera, point and clicks are hardly bigger than your average high-end phone and will easily fit inside a woman's handbag or in a pouch on a man's belt, no issue there. A 4GB iPod nano (or the like) with headphones around it is unlikely to prove an issue for a woman's handbag or a man's jacket/jeans pocket, and the Shox... okay, there is a small problem for the men.

So for the most part, having dedicated devices that will offer you much higher quality sound, picture, and navigation aren't all that hard to organize if you know where to look. This is very much like my view on gaming laptops – if you're willing to accept less for more, by all means go for the all-in-one portable device, however if it leaves you wanting, there are alternatives out there. **NAG**

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**PC-X900**

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M/B	ATX / M-ATX
PCI	7 Slots
Fan	120mm x 5
I/O Ports	USB 3.0 x 4, E-SATA, HD Audio
Dimensions	230 x 583 x 375 mm (W, H, D)
Color	red / black / silver

**PC-A77F**

Bay	5.25" x 12, 3.5" internal x 9 (use 5.25" x 9bays)
M/B	E-ATX / ATX / M-ATX / CEB
PCI	8 Slots
Fan	120mm x 4, 140mm x 2
I/O Ports	USB 3.0 x 4, E-SATA, HD Audio
Dimensions	220 x 595 x 590 mm (W, H, D)
Color	red / black / silver

**PC-8FIR**

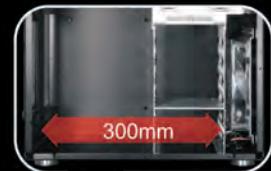
Bay	5.25" x 3, 3.5" x 1(use one 5.25" to 3.5"converter), 3.5" internal x 6
M/B	ATX / M-ATX
PCI	8 Slots
Fan	120mm x 3, (Spare 140mm fan mount x1 in top cover)
I/O Ports	USB 3.0 x 2, E-SATA, HD Audio
Dimensions	210 x 460 x 490 mm (W, H, D)
Color	red / black / silver

**PC-08FIB**

Bay	5.25" x 3, 3.5" x 1(use one 5.25" to 3.5"converter), 3.5" internal x 6
M/B	ATX / M-ATX
PCI	8 Slots
Fan	120mm x 3, (Spare 140mm fan mount x1 in top cover)
I/O Ports	USB 3.0 x 2, E-SATA, HD Audio
Dimensions	210 x 460 x 490 mm (W, H, D)
Color	red / black / silver



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## PITSTOP SERIES

Mini-ITX Test Bench

DIY



**T60**

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M/B: ATX / M-ATX  
PCI: 8 slots  
SIZE: 351 x 330 x 400mm  
Color: red / black / silver  
Optional: USB3.0 x2/E-SATA/HD Audio

**T7**

Bay: 5.25" x 1, 3.5" internal x 1  
M/B: Mini ITX  
PCI: 2 slots  
SIZE: 231 x 210 x 395mm  
Color: red / black / silver  
Optional: USB3.0 x2/E-SATA/HD Audio

**PC-V352B**

Bay: 5.25" x 1, 3.5" x 1,  
3.5" internal x 3  
M/B: Micro ATX  
Fan: 2 x 12cm, 1 x 8cm  
I/O: USB3.0 x 2, E-SATA, HD Audio  
Color: red / black / silver

**PC-Q08**

Bay: 5.25" x 1, 3.5" internal x 6,  
2.5" internal x 1  
M/B: Mini ITX  
Fan: 1 x 12cm, 1 x 14cm  
I/O: USB3.0 x 2, HD Audio  
Color: red / black / silver

**PC-Q06B**

Bay: 5.25" x 1, 3.5" internal x 1  
M/B: Mini ITX  
(Optional:ATX / M-ATX)  
PCI: 2 slots  
I/O: USB3.0 x2, HD Audio  
Color: red / black / silver

## 2010 SPECIAL EDITION

Mini-ITX Spider Test Bench



**T1**

Bay: Slim ODD x 1, 3.5" Internal x 1  
M/B: Mini ITX  
SIZE: 227 x 272 x 345mm(W,H,D)  
Color: red / black / silver

# DIY: Hands-on with Dremel

## Part 3: Xbox 360 modding: Side panel window and paint-job

**"BLING" MODS LIKE LAST** month's aren't restricted to the realm of PCs. Once your console has outlived its warranty – or if those things don't matter to you – it's perfectly acceptable to open it up and start tinkering. In this tutorial, we'll show you how to open your Xbox 360, cut out a hole and install a suitably-stylish window, and paint the unit in any colour you wish. I must stress that this will void your warranty if it's not yet expired. Only do this mod if you're happy with the potential consequences, and, as always, seek further advice if you're not sure of something. We're happy to answer any questions you may have with regards to this or future projects.

This will be the first of a three-part Xbox 360 modding tutorial, but the principles can apply to any console or peripheral. I suggest that you think of a theme or outline for your whole mod. I've decided to honour the upcoming game *Red Dead Redemption* with this mod, so I'm going for a stark red paint job and shattered-glass side panel window. In a later tutorial, I'll show you how to install an after-market cooling system and some fancy lighting to give that window a chance to shine.

### STEP 1: OPEN IT UP

First, remove the faceplate by giving it a firm tug. Now undock the side venting panels: pop the internal retaining clips by inserting the Torx screwdriver or something similarly slim through the nearby venting holes. Just look carefully and you'll spot them. Head to the rear side of the unit; gently insert the flat screwdriver into the six small flat holes – don't twist or pry, just push them in until you hear the retaining clips pop out. The bottom half of the case should now be loose enough to pull away near the back. Then at the front, pop open the four retaining clips. The entire bottom panel can now be removed.

With the underside of the steel frame exposed, unscrew the six screws marked in the image. Now you should be able to easily remove the top of the case. If you own an Arcade or Core unit, you should also remove the DVD drive bezel and eject button, to colour-code the faceplate.

### STEP 2: CUT OUT THE WINDOW

First you need to mark out where you're going to cut; take note of the location of the screw-holes on the inside. While most side-window projects involve a rectangle with rounded edges, because it's relatively simple but good-looking, you can cut any shape you want; some modders online have cut out images or even words. Prepare your Dremel with the cutting disc; turn the speed up to four and start cutting. If you, like me, lacked the foresight to see just how tough it'd be to cut small details, just rough it out as close as possible with the Dremel or even a drill, and do the rest with the file.

### STEP 3: CLEAN UP

This is where you fix up all the imperfections from your work in the previous step. Take your time with this. Before you start sanding, you'll need to trim off any leftover support struts on the inside of the case – make sure that the inside surface area is smooth to allow the Plexiglas to fit in easily. Give all the edges a once-over with the Dremel, fitted with a sanding band at a low speed to get rid of any bumps or other unsightly bits, then do the rest by hand. Use a file to straighten any unruly edges and the sandpaper to give everything an ultra-smooth finish.

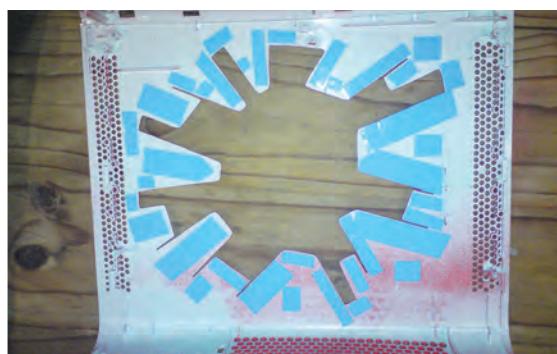
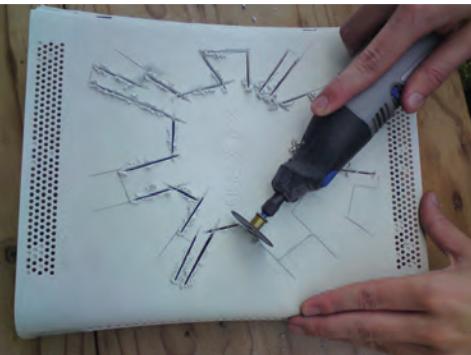
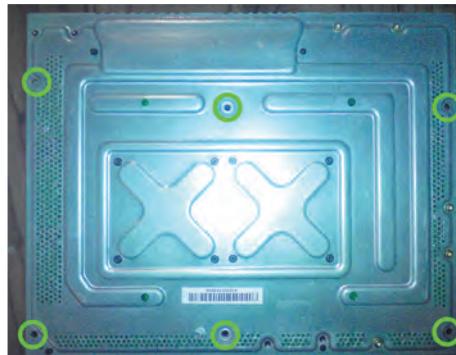
In preparation for the next step, thoroughly clean, rinse and dry everything that you're going to paint. Any dirt will severely mess with your artistic endeavours.

### STEP 4: PAINT

Mask out any areas that you don't want painted (like the power button and optical sensor on the faceplate). Shake the can well – longer than you usually would for spray-paint. Three light coats with the can held about 20–30cm away from the surface should suffice for an even finish, but follow the instructions on the can if you're in any doubt. Make sure that you cover every little hole and crevice. Give the paint a good few hours to dry or a whole day if possible.

### What you will need

- A console
- A Dremel with plastic cutting disc SC576 and sanding bands/disks
- Steel file and sandpaper (one piece of 120 and 600 grit should suffice).
- A Torx 10 and a small flat screwdriver
- Vinyl spray-paint. I'm using DupliColor Vinyl and Fabric Coating. You can get this or any decent automotive accessories store such as Autostyle ([www.autostyle.co.za](http://www.autostyle.co.za))
- A sheet of clear acrylic (Plexiglas/Perspex/etc)
- Masking tape and the thinnest double-sided tape you can find



### STEP 5: INSTALL THE WINDOW

Cut the Plexiglas to roughly the same shape (although slightly bigger, obviously) as your window. Stick double-sided tape along the edge of the cut-out and anywhere else you think the window may need extra support. You could also use hot glue but make sure that you keep it neat; that stuff gets everywhere. When you're ready, peel off the film from the exposed side of the tape and stick the Plexi down firmly but gently.

Plexiglas comes in many different names, colours, and thicknesses. The types are very important as some are more flexible, scratch resistant or heat retardant. Most Plexi comes with a protective sheet covering both sides to protect it while working it.

**Geoff Burrows**

I also disassembled and painted my hard drive. To do this, remove the four Torx screws on the underside (the fourth is hidden behind the silver Microsoft sticker) and open the unit. Remove the eject button, mechanism and spring. Slide a knife underneath the drive cage to break the adhesive holding it down. Finally, unclip the four retaining clips holding down the silver-coloured band to separate the cover.



You could also paint some of the internal surfaces to match or complement your exterior paint-job. I've chosen to paint the optical drive cover (with the labels removed) and air duct with a regular matt black spray-paint.

#### Tips from the experts

Cutting Plexiglas can be pretty easy with a Dremel rotary tool and plastic cutting discs. Either use a cordless tool or a corded tool with a flexible shaft, which gives you enough flexibility and room to work. Use the Dremel cutting disc SC 476 on medium speed to prevent the Plexiglas from melting. The edge of the disc is specially designed to cut plastics; it prevents clogging up and ensures the disc has a longer lifetime.

Sand the edges of the Plexi with Dremel sanding bands. Start with grit 60, then move up to grit 120 to remove any imperfections. The Dremel shaper/router table model 231 is of great

help when sanding, as it converts your Dremel into a bench mounted tool to allow you to slide the Plexi over the table. The adjustable fence of the table helps you to precisely guide your Plexi along the sanding band. Finally use Dremel's abrasive buffs for finely sanding the edges.

To polish the part of the Plexiglas that you have just sanded, use a Dremel polishing wheel together with polishing compound 421. Make sure that your polishing wheel is completely coated with the compound. Run the tool at no higher than 20,000rpm, and don't apply too much pressure while polishing. This will give your Plexiglas a nice finish.

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# Software

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So you've all heard about overclocking, been to rAge and seen the demonstrations, and keep reading about the results in day-to-day scenarios. Normally, when overclocking comes up in a discussion, words like "liquid nitrogen" and "dead hardware" crop up, and while this is all true, these are only factors dealt with by extreme overclockers and 99% of the time aren't part of the overclocking process at all.

So, even people like you can reap the benefits overclocking can bring. All you need is a bit of a guide in the right direction. Bear in mind that this guide is merely covering the basics. To discuss everything there is to know regarding overclocking we would need more space than we have available this issue. Furthermore, we will deal with only software-based overclocking, we will not venture into the BIOS (where real men live) or change voltages, for two reasons: it gets far more complicated in the BIOS and more dangerous when you start changing voltages. So with this in mind, read on to learn what tweaks and software you need to get more out of that machine of yours.

## MONITORS

The first thing any overclocker needs is a suite of monitoring tools, things that provide him with information regarding things like the temperature of components, how fast the FSB is running, and so on. These are:

### CPU-Z

[www.cpuid.com/cpuz.php](http://www.cpuid.com/cpuz.php) | 738KB (Freeware)

The most fundamental application used by all overclockers, from day-to-day types through to the best

in the world. It provides you with information about your CPU such as FSB and multiplier, and also information about your RAM such as speed and timings. Do not attempt overclocking without this application.

### GPU-Z

[www.techpowerup.com](http://www.techpowerup.com) | 509KB (Freeware)

Very similar to CPU-Z, this is the must-have application when attempting to overclock your graphics card. Providing information ranging from temperatures of components most never knew existed, through to core and memory speeds on your graphics card, this is a very comprehensive utility.

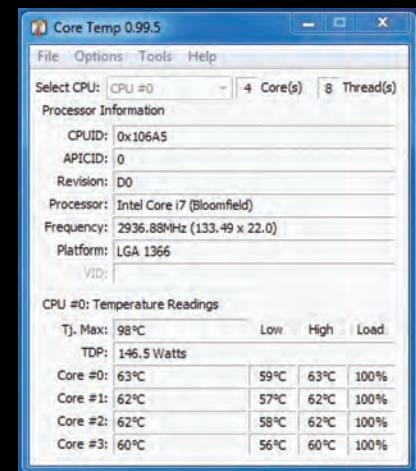
### Core Temp

[www.alcpu.com/CoreTemp/](http://www.alcpu.com/CoreTemp/) | 172KB (Freeware)

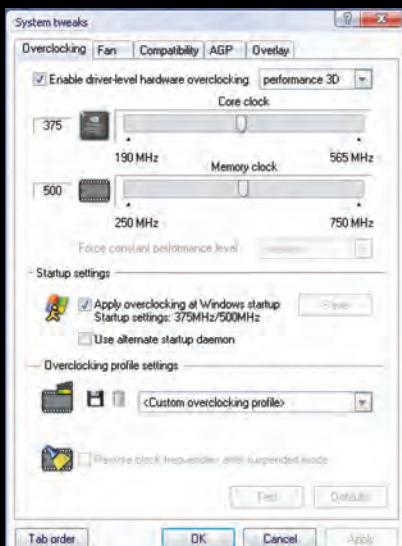
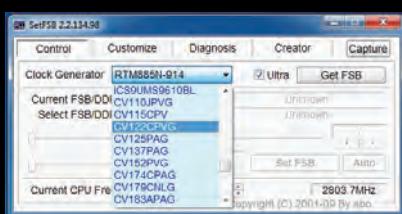
Core Temp is an application that provides you with temperature readings of your CPU cores. With the ability to set alarms and shutdown limits, Core Temp is very useful to have.

### TWEAKERS

Right, next up will be the software you need to tweak



# Tweaking



your components. Used incorrectly, this software can permanently damage your hardware, so use it at your own risk. That being said, the chance of you unintentionally damaging hardware when following this guide is slim.

#### SetFSB

[www13.plala.or.jp/setfsb/](http://www13.plala.or.jp/setfsb/) | 221KB (Freeware)

This is the application that you'll be using to actually change your CPU's frequency. Before we get into detail here it should be noted that some of the bigger brands such as ASUS and EVGA have their own software that does pretty much the same thing as SetFSB. If your motherboard came with that software we would recommend using it over SetFSB. SetFSB only works for certain motherboards and chipsets, so make sure yours is supported before attempting to use the program.

#### RivaTuner

[www.guru3d.com](http://www.guru3d.com) | 2.7MB (Freeware)

RivaTuner is the graphics card equivalent of SetFSB, so much of the same said there applies to this.

#### STRESS TESTS

Stress tests play a big part in overclocking. They help you determine how stable your system is after overclocking and let you know the limits of your hardware.

#### SuperPI

<http://superpi.ilbello.com/> | 60KB (Freeware)

A test often used by overclockers, it is more a benchmark of performance rather than a stress test, but will serve its purpose here. The "1M" test in SuperPI gives us a quick indication that we haven't been too enthusiastic with the overclocking and that so far, basic applications are working.

#### 3DMark06

[www.futuremark.com](http://www.futuremark.com) | 584.6MB (Freeware)

A slightly older version of the 3D Mark series, it is almost guaranteed to run on any hardware you'd have in a gaming system today. It provides both graphics-intense and CPU-related aspects of the benchmark for a test of overall system stability.

#### Prime95 and OCCT

[www.mersenneforum.org](http://www.mersenneforum.org) | 992KB (Freeware)

[www.ocbase.com](http://www.ocbase.com) | 3.5MB (Freeware)

Both of these applications are designed to stress test your computer, making sure that your overclocked settings are perfectly stable (we wouldn't want your PC crashing in a game of *Modern Warfare 2* or *HoN*, now would we?). A general rule of thumb is that if your PC can pass two hours of Prime95 and OCCT, it is perfectly stable for general use.

#### HOW TO TWEAK

##### The CPU

**Step 1:** Open CPU-Z twice, one instance on the CPU tab, one on the Memory tab. This is to keep an eye on frequencies. Once this is done, open up Core Temp and have a look at your temperatures.

**Step 2:** Launch SetFSB. You will see a menu where you are able to choose "PLL". Scroll down and select the PLL for your motherboard. You can check which PLL is the correct one for your motherboard in the text file bundled with the SetFSB application. Once this is done, the process becomes simple. Increase the FSB using set FSB. In the case of Core 2 Duo/Quad CPUs, five points is usually a good starting point whereas Core i5 and i7 would be better off at one point. After you click Apply you will see your CPU frequency change in CPU-Z

**"The actual act of overclocking the system isn't that long or difficult, it's the stress testing that will have you on the edge of your seat for hours."**

along with the memory frequency. If you have reached this point, congratulations, you have overclocked your first CPU. Feel proud. Now, onto Step 3.

**Step 3:** Stress testing. Once you have increased the CPU speed you will need to determine how stable your system is. This involves running the stress testers until you are satisfied with the performance you achieve.

**Step 4:** Repeat step 2 and 3 until you have reached your maximum stable frequency where limiting factors like voltage, heat and memory multipliers can play a part.

**Note:** Do not expect massive performance increases! The above technique is used by tweakers throughout the world only after they have changed BIOS settings. That's how they achieve the speeds they do. Without tweaking in the BIOS you will be lucky to achieve a 10% higher clock speed. A 5% increase is more realistic.

#### The Graphics Card

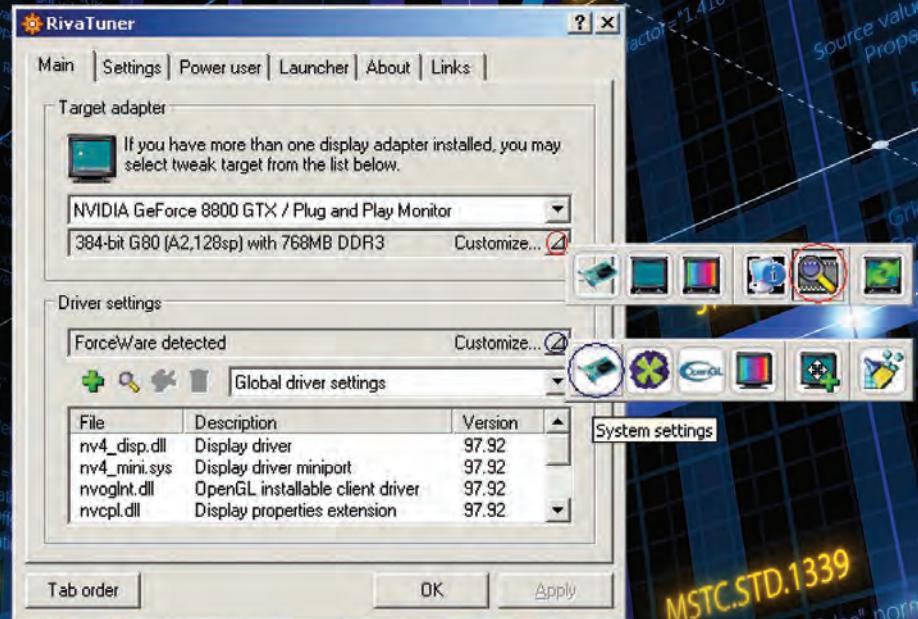
**Step 1:** Open two instances of GPU-Z, with one displaying the graphics card information tab and the other displaying the graphics card temperatures tab. Once this is complete, run RivaTuner and select the small flashing icon. Once this loads a menu, select the first icon in that menu. Lastly, enable the overclocking features in the check box and click on the "detect now" button.

**Step 2:** Increase the graphics card core clock speed by a few MHz (I usually tweak in 5MHz increments) and apply the changes. Much the same as the CPU, congrats! You have overclocked your first graphics card!

**Step 3:** Run 3DMark06 and see if the system is stable and doesn't overheat. Graphics cards are extremely hot pieces of hardware so watch temperatures carefully.

**Step 4:** Once you have determined your maximum stable graphics card core clock, repeat the process for the graphics card memory by using the slider underneath the core clock slider.

**Warning:** Once again, keep your expectations low. Depending on the graphics card at hand, you will net between 5% and 20% increase in performance, which will have a measurable effect on your games. Furthermore setting the clocks too high on your graphics card will result in "artifacts" on your screen. These are anomalies in the graphics ranging from a small green pixel through to an



array of large Christmas-tree-light-like boxes. Do not panic. Turn your settings down and start again. Lastly, always remember to check the "Apply at startup" checkbox, otherwise the settings you have tested to will revert back to default as soon as you restart your computer.

#### CONCLUSION

When all is said and done, the process of tweaking and gaining more performance out of your system using only software-based overclocking utilities is tedious and time consuming. The actual act of overclocking the system isn't that long or difficult, it's the stress testing that will have you on the edge of your seat for hours. Always remember to keep an eye on temperatures and artifacts, and limit yourself to reasonable expectations of the system. While 4% doesn't seem like much, 4% on the CPU is the difference in clock speed between an i7 920 and i7 930. That's R500's worth of performance you have achieved for no money and a bit of effort on your part. The difference between a standard 4890 and a superclocked, XXX, or TOP edition card is roughly 15% in performance, but upwards of R600 in price. This is the reason people tweak: to get higher end performance without spending more money, and trust me, this is possible. That being said, happy overclocking and enjoy whatever performance increase you get for free. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

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## Intel Core i5 661

**W**HETHER YOU'RE A FAN or not, it is very clear that Intel has had the performance advantage for several years now (in fact since the Core 2 CPU) and with the latest Core i3, i5 and i7 CPUs that performance lead has been exaggerated in certain models.

However the price/performance market has been largely dominated by AMD with their Athlon II and Phenom II products. So with the Westmere Clarkdale processors, Intel is looking to win that segment as well. While the initial offerings of the LGA 1156 platform CPUs were good performers, the pricing structure was not very friendly and often it was cheaper to purchase a system based on the X58 chipset instead of the P55.

With that said, prices settled and P55 based motherboards are very cheap and now, it makes more economic sense to go the LGA 1156 route than investing in the LGA 1366 platform.

With the new line of Core i5 series CPUs, however, Intel seems set on covering the market with products at every price point, not necessarily through the CPU alone, but the platform in its entirety. This is because it is always more lucrative to sell an entire platform than individual parts especially for OEMs, mobile and other such markets where margins are significantly lower than they are in the more expensive product lines.

The Intel Core i5 661 is one such product that attempts to simplify the platform when

paired with the H55/H57/Q57 chipsets, and through this simplification make the platform cheaper.

The new Core i5 series of processors make use of the 32nm 2<sup>nd</sup> generation High-K immersion lithographic process. This marks the first time Intel is using both the 32nm node and immersion lithography which was turned to for several reasons, but mostly because it makes smaller nodes possible without spending vast amounts of resources on newer lithographic technologies.

The Core i5 661 as stated earlier is based on the Westmere architecture which is the successor to the Nehalem architecture found in many of the Core i7 and Core i5 CPUs we have on the market today. The die for this dual core CPU itself is very small, at 81mm and that makes it cheap to

manufacture for Intel, but with that, as an entire CPU it features two separate dies. The second die contains the IGP (integrated graphics processor) and the Memory controller which unlike the CPU die are based on the older 45nm node. As a result the IGP and memory controller together account for the larger of the two chips on the CPU package. Having said that, this was to be expected if R&D costs were to be kept low and the CPU was to announce in a timely manner.

The decision to go with the 45nm node for the 2<sup>nd</sup> chip was an obvious one because



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- Thermal Management
- Universal Socket
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- AMD: AM3/AM2+/AM2

CL-P0523



## THE SCORE

**>PLUS**

- + Fantastic overclocker
- + Price

**>MINUS**

- Performance efficiency lower than expected
- IGP sub-par performance

**>Bottom Line**

A low-end, four-thread Core i5 CPU with acceptable performance and a good price.

**NA**  
out of ten

**COREX**  
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## GIGABYTE GA-P55A-UD7

**I**T SHOULD COME AS no surprise to anyone by now that GIGABYTE is, if not the premier motherboard manufacturer of enthusiast grade motherboards, certainly an equal to any other manufacturer that can make such a bold claim. With every introduction of a new chipset, not only do the features get better, the quality improves as well.

The P55A-UD7 is no exception to this, and as the premium P55 based chipset from the company (taking over from the P55A-UD6) it features everything the previous motherboard did but with the exception of being 3-way SLI capable. This in itself may not seem like a big deal but it completes the P55 platform and brings it closer to the X58 chipset in capability.

This 3-Way SLI (and 3-way Crossfire support as well) comes courtesy of the NF200 PCI-Express chip which splits the second set of PCI-Express lanes into an 8x, 8x configuration making a 16x, 8x and 8x configuration possible. It's a nice feature for those looking to build ultra high end machines based on the P55 chipset or those who want to employ three graphics processors, using one solely for PhysX calculations. Whichever configuration is employed, there are certainly benefits to having the additional PCI-Express lanes.

On to the less obvious changes, we have an improved CPU socket that should be immune to the rare CPU socket burn that affected the P55A-UD6 under very extreme conditions. To that end, the CPU bracket or clamp remains the same but is nickel plated, which, if anything helps the motherboard in the aesthetics department.

On a more functional note, the Northbridge cooling mechanism has been changed in favour of a more effective solution that employs a fin like structure directly above the chipset, in addition to the optional heatsink that provides additional cooling. All the cooling

components are mounted using spring loaded screws which means for the first time in this line every single cooling component can be removed from the motherboard and substituted with custom solutions. A change that will be appreciated by enthusiasts and those who employ water cooling for almost every component on their systems.

On to the actual motherboard performance, gone are the six DIMM RAM slots instead a more traditional 4-slot design is used. While we cannot know how true this is, it was apparently done to reduce costs, reduce RMA rates and save on motherboard real estate. We cannot say the two additional slots will be missed and if the slots had to go in favour of performance we would take performance over the slots any day.

Out the box performance is pretty much the same as that of the P55A-UD6, however the BIOS has several new features in terms of voltage adjustments and where overclocking is concerned the UD7 is vastly superior to the UD6. This is evident in several world records that have been broken using the P55A-UD7 and as it stood at the time of writing, the P55A-UD7 had more records than any other P55 motherboard on the market.

In our own testing, setting up the motherboard to a 200MHz BCLK was very easy, in fact it needed no other adjustments save for actually typing in the 200MHz BCLK frequency and reducing the CPU clock multiplier. Higher frequencies needed some other adjustments, but for the most part overclocking this motherboard was incredibly easy and that extended to setting memory clocks as well.

Setting up the memory to 2.2GHz and higher was as simple as selecting the right memory frequency multiplier and setting the desired BCLK frequency. Once that was done, and the right DRAM voltage dialled the system booted windows just fine. At similar settings

### Specifications

**Chipset:** Intel P55  
**Memory banks:** 4xDDR3 184-pin  
**CPU Support:** Intel Core i3/Core i5/Core i7  
**Slots:** 4x PCI-E 16X (16x8x8x8x), 1x PCI-E 1X, 2x PCI 2.2

### Benchmarks

**Super Pi 8M:** 2 min 6.703 seconds  
**CineBench 11.5:** 6.20  
**3DMark06 CPU:** 5,587  
**Everest Read:** 19,394 MB/sec  
**Everest Copy:** 22,671 MB/sec  
**Everest Write:** 15,888 MB/sec  
**Latency:** 38.1ns

to other motherboards, it posted better results in the majority of the tests and in particular in the Everest Memory Read test where it scored almost a full 1GB/sec more in bandwidth than other P55 motherboards (P55A-UD6 included).

Right now the P55A-UD7 is certainly the best P55 effort from GIGABYTE and most definitely one worth considering if you're in the market. **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**

### THE SCORE

**>Plus**  
 + 24-phase power  
 + USB3.0 performance  
 + Efficiency

**>Minus**  
 - PCI-Express slot spacing

### >Bottom Line

The best LGA 1156 motherboard on the market currently.

**08**  
out of ten



## COGAGE Arrow CPU Cooler

THROUGH SLOW-BUT-STeady progress and the obvious and unavoidable copying of competitor products, it's safe to say that the worst CPU coolers today are easily better than the best ones produced three or four years ago. It only took a single company to spearhead the design (several heat pipe's leading into a tower of fins with a fan blowing across them) for others to see that this was the way forward.

Proof of this is can be found in a cooler such as the Arrow unit we have here. It is similar to many high end CPU coolers in today's market, however instead of a single fin tower, it employs two which dissipate heat from the same set of heat pipes. The Arrow unit easily matches (and sometimes outpaces) premium Thermalright and Zalman products, but does so at a more reasonable price, which is always welcome.

As always, how a CPU cooler deals with load temperatures and noise levels is of the utmost importance in modern heat sinks. The Arrow unit delivers in this regard. Not only does it manage to keep an overclocked Core

### Specifications

**Fan:** 120mm  
**Heatpipes:** 4  
**Weight:** 825g  
**Socket:** LGA 1156, 1366, 775

i7 870 CPU under the 60°C mark at full load (4.4GHz HT on), temperatures in the BIOS are at a sturdy 48°C with 1.4V pushed through the CPU. Impressive performance and without question the best air based CPU cooler to come under our scrutiny in a very long time. Regrettably, however, the unnecessarily complex installation mechanism, its low clearance and wide body mean that it's impossible to use high profile RAM modules with this cooler. Corsair modules that employ DHX technology and other similar sets cannot be installed in the first pair of DIMM sockets on any motherboard. So it's worth keeping in mind before purchasing this cooler. If you use regular height DIMMs however, there are few coolers that can match the Arrow unit. **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**

### THE SCORE

**>Plus**  
 + Great performance  
 + Low-noise 120mm fan

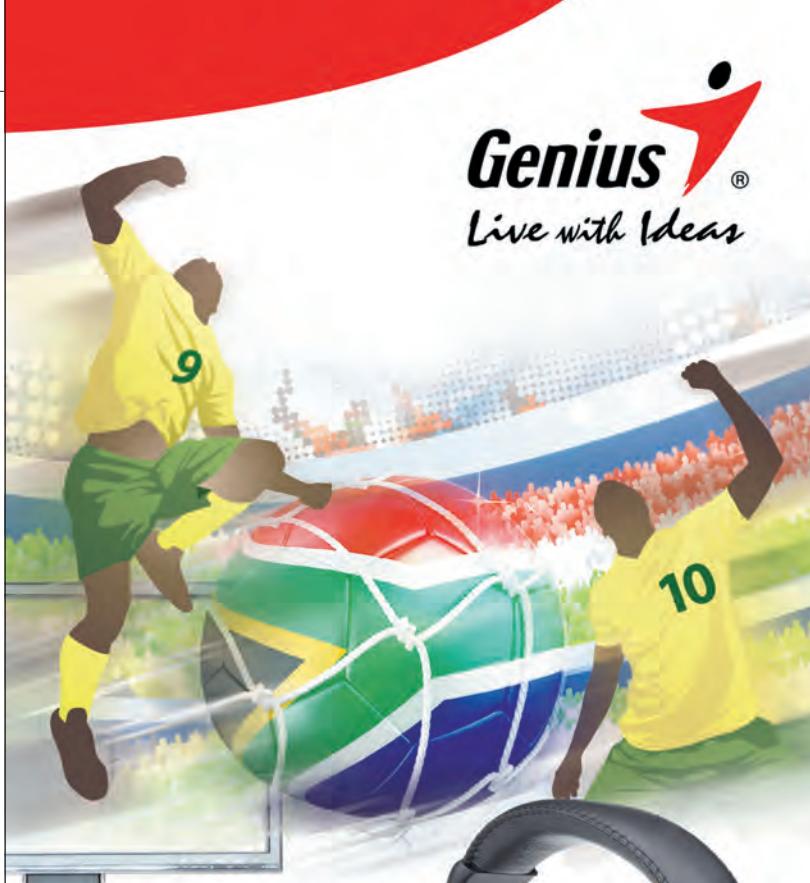
**>Minus**  
 - Tragic install mechanism  
 - Incompatible with many high-end RAM sets

#### Bottom Line

An affordable CPU cooler with fantastic performance that shames competing solutions, but not useable with very high-end DIMM modules.

**07**  
out of ten

**Genius**  
Live with Ideas



Navigator G500  
Gaming Grade/1600 DPI



NetScroll G500 Laser  
DPI Adjustment/2000dpi



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HS-04V  
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HS-03U  
Vibration/USB



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## Edimax MA-2000 Digital Network Media Adapter

**SINCE YOU'RE READING THIS** review in SNAG, we're going to assume you're just like us and you've got a couple hundred gigabytes of movies, TV shows and music that you've – cough, acquired – over the years scattered across your hard drives. We'll also assume that, occasionally, you like to watch/listen this media on something other than your PC. Now, if you already have a PS3 or Xbox 360, then you're sorted out. If you don't, then what's the matter with you, and why are you reading this magazine?

Okay, we understand. Maybe you're just short on cash, or you're anti-console. Or you only own a Wii. Two of the three are excusable. If that's the case, then you might want to look into getting yourself a network media player.

The latest one of these to cross our desk was the Edimax MA-2000 Digital Network Media Adapter, and on the surface, this seemed like a pretty decent product. It supports a robust array of audio, video and image file formats. It can read shared folders on your network or NAS. It has two USB ports on the front for plugging in flash media or external hard drives. On the back, it can output video via component, composite, S-Video or HDMI cable. It also supports S/PDIF optical audio. The MA-2000 can do

a few things most media players don't support: it can display real-time video from an IP camera; and using your network's internet connection, download files with a built-in BitTorrent client.

It sounds great, and it is capable of all of those things for the most part, but there were a few issues. The biggest issue was getting the unit to actually see our shared network folders. After hours of trying, we gave up on Windows 7 and tried it in Vista. After another half hour of fiddling and playing with folder permissions, we got it to work. Mind you, all of these files were already visible to the Xbox in both Windows 7 and Vista.

Playback of video is limited to 720P, even via the HDMI cable. The on-screen display is very spartan, and is little more than a glorified file browser. It offers no additional information beyond a file name. The device has no wireless network support built in (it can, however, connect to a wireless network with an additional USB dongle), which means your router either must be close to your TV, or you have to run a long network cable across your lounge. And those extra features we mentioned earlier? The MA-2000 is only compatible with a couple of Edimax IP cameras, and the BitTorrent client is much

### Specifications

**Inputs:** 2 x USB, 1 x 10/100Mbps Ethernet

**Outputs:** Component, Composite, HDMI, S/PDIF optical, S-Video

**Multimedia support:**

**Video:** WMV, MP4 (Divx, Xvid) H.264, MKV,

ISO/IFO, Real Video

**Audio:** WMA, MP3, OGG, FLAC, Real Audio

**Image:** JPEG, BMP, PNG, GIF

less powerful and versatile than anything you could get on a PC. The only real advantage to it is that you could torrent a file while your computer was turned off.

At the end of the day, the Edimax MA-2000 Digital Network Media Adapter is an average product. It does most of the things it sets out to do, but lacks the polish to make it a must-buy. You'd be better off saving your R1,500 and putting it toward the purchase of a console. **NAG**

**Chris Bistline**

### THE SCORE

**>Plus**

- + HDMI output
- + Good file format support

**>Minus**

- Only 720P
- No built-in wireless

**>Bottom Line**

The MA-2000 is a functional media player with a few extra bells and whistles.

**05**  
out of ten



## Edimax Wireless 3G-6210n Portable Router

**W**HILE 3G ADMITTEDLY IS not the best way to connect to the internet when it comes to gaming, it does have the advantage of portability over its wired-down brethren. That portability, though, generally comes with the limit of being connected to one computer at a time. Sure, there are 3G routers on the market if you want to set up a network and share your internet connection with other users, but in order for them to work you've got to plug them in somewhere. Wouldn't it be nice if the internet – and your network – were truly wireless?

Enter the Edimax Wireless 3G-6210n Portable Router. Since it comes equipped with a Li-ion battery, you can take it anywhere and set up your network without the need for power or wires. Unfortunately, it's not an all-in-one solution because it doesn't have a modem. You need to connect a USB 3G modem to the router in order to access the internet, but if you already happen to have one, then the 6210n will come considerably cheaper than a similar router with a modem built in.

From a technical standpoint, the little Edimax router is pretty competent. In addition to the USB port for a 3G modem, it has an Ethernet port for hooking it up to an ADSL connection. It supports the 802.11 b, g and n wireless standards and has a host of security features you'd expect from any wireless router.

After charging the battery for the first

### Features

**Ports:** Ethernet for ADSL, USB 2.0 for 3G

**Wireless standards:** 802.11 b/g/n

**Dimensions:** 125 x 85 x 25mm

time, which took about four hours, I set out to put the router through its paces. Setup was fairly simple, and in about ten minutes, I was playing *Modern Warfare 2* on my desktop, running Windows Update on my netbook and downloading a demo from LIVE on my Xbox 360. While all this was going on, I moved the router over next to the window to get a better 3G signal – an unexpected advantage of not being constrained by network cables or a power plug. After about an hour, I sat down to watch a movie, streaming it from my PC to the Xbox, all the while surfing the web with the netbook on my lap.

And then the battery died, and my little orgy of geekdom came to a screeching halt. Overall, it had lasted a little over two hours under fairly heavy usage, and fortunately I was at home, so I just had to plug it in for the fun to continue.

So, the moral of the story is: enjoy your freedom while it lasts. The Edimax Wireless 3G-6210n Portable Router is limited by its battery, but if you need to set up a wireless 3G network on the go – and you already have a 3G modem – it's a fine choice. **NAG**

**Chris Bistline**

### THE SCORE

>**PLUS**  
+ Portability  
+ Wireless N compatible

>**MINUS**  
- Battery life  
- No modem

#### >Bottom Line

If you need to set up a wireless network with internet access on the fly, this is a great product. Just remember your 3G modem.

07  
out of ten

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# MSI R5770 Hawk

**W**E'RE ALMOST HALFWAY INTO 2010, and just about every manufacturer is producing Radeon HD5000 series cards. As a result, it's grown increasingly more difficult to separate the truly great products from the average. This is especially true in the mid-range market where the Radeon 5770 competes with some last generation high-end parts from NVIDIA and ATI. However, given that NVIDIA does not have any DirectX11 mid-range parts on the market, most users are left with little choice but to turn to the 5770.

Luckily, there are a few cards like the Hawk which, as far as we have seen, is the best HD5770 on the market. Not only does it feature a custom brown PCB, Samsung 0.4ns rated GDDR5 RAM and custom PWM circuitry, it has among the best coolers the VGA market has ever seen. It's quite small but very effective in controlling the temperatures, and at the same time, still manages to be whisper quiet. It features three heat pipes that feed an array of fins. This array is then cooled by two fans, which, even at maximum rotation, are not any louder than the reference cooler used on other 5770 products. Besides the cooling abilities it also makes for a very attractive card.

Performance above all else, however, is what we are concerned with and here is where the R5770 Hawk shines. Not at the reference speeds – because those only offer a 25MHz overclock – but at 925MHz, the card really delivers some good

## Benchmarks

**Heaven Benchmark 1680x1050:** 669  
**3DMark Vantage:** P11502  
**Resident Evil 5 1680x1050:** 73.3

performance for a mid-range part. With the memory overclocked past the rated 2,500MHz to 2,620 you can get a slight boost at the higher resolutions, and playing some titles at 1,920 x 1,080 becomes possible with slightly lowered image quality. However, should you prefer pixel quality over the quantity, the overclocked settings will still be beneficial especially in very demanding games like *Metro 2033*.

Overall, the Hawk is a great card. If you are keen on the 5770, there just isn't a better model than the MSI R5770 Hawk. **NAG**  
**Neo Sibeko**



## THE SCORE

### >Plus

- + DirectX11
- + Good performance
- + Whisper quiet

### >Minus

- Price

### >Bottom Line

One of the better – if not the best HD5770 – you can find on the market.

07  
out of ten

## Specifications

**Core:** 875MHz Juniper (40nm)  
**Processors:** 800  
**Render Outputs:** 16  
**Memory:** 1GB GDDR5 4.8GHz (76.8GB/sec)  
**API:** DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.0

# MSI Big Bang-Trinergy

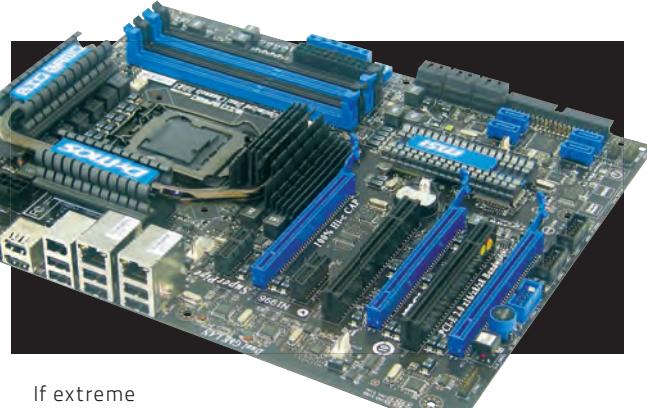
**O**VER THE LAST COUPLE of years MSI has been steadily improving not only their image among gamers and enthusiasts, but their products as well. With a concerted effort made towards catering for the most demanding power users, each product has been an improvement over their previous effort. Of late, MSI has impressed power users the world over with their Lightning range of graphics cards, quite possibly the best range of display adapters the industry has ever seen, and with the Trinergy, it's clear that MSI is hoping to produce equivalent quality in their motherboards as well.

With their newer P55-based models, MSI has produced some of their best motherboards to date. This is particularly true for the Big Bang-Fuzion and Trinergy. Not only is the Trinergy among the first P55 boards to support triple SLI in the market, it is most certainly MSI's fastest P55 motherboard. Performance is a little better than that of the P55-GD85, however it's the overclocking that is noticeably better. The BIOS options are pretty much standard across the range, but voltage and current stability are better on the Trinergy board.

Testing with the Core i5 661, we were not able to reach any BC1k frequency past 215MHz for some odd reason, but this could be BIOS or memory related. Reaching that limit, however, was very easy with no advanced options needing

## Specifications

**Chipset:** Intel P55  
**Memory banks:** 4xDDR3 184-pin  
**CPU Support:** Intel Core i3/  
Corei5/Core i7  
**Slots:** 4x PCI-E 16X (16x8x8x8x), 1x PCI-E 1X,  
2xPCI 2.2



to be changed. With a dedicated effort, a newer BIOS, and some exotic cooling, we're convinced some impressive numbers can be generated from this motherboard, as it's clear that this motherboard is targeted at overclockers with on-board voltage read points, OC Genie and a generous PCI-Express slot layout. It's about as impressive as most high-end motherboards from MSI's competitors.

If extreme overclocking isn't your thing, this board will still work well for a high-end gaming machine. With triple SLI support and an impressive ALC889 powered audio adapter it's probably as complete a P55 motherboard as you could expect from MSI. MSI has come a long way, and the Big Bang-Trinergy is proof of this. **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**

## THE SCORE

### >Plus

- + Capacity
- + Performance
- + SATA 6Gbps

### >Minus

- Could have been faster

### >Bottom Line

Lots of space with fairly quick performance. It will be hard to find a better drive.

07  
out of ten

## Benchmarks

**Super Pi 8M:** 2 min 6.969 seconds  
**CineBench 11.5:** 6.20  
**3DMark06 CPU:** 5,584  
**Everest Read:** 18,301 MB/sec  
**Everest Copy:** 22,605 MB/sec  
**Everest Write:** 15,575 MB/sec  
**Latency:** 38.5ns



The built-in fan can be turned on/off and the audio volume can be adjusted using the controls on the N700.

## Logitech Speaker Lapdesk N700

**WE ALL KNOW THAT** Logitech are masters of top-notch design, sturdy build quality and high-performance products. It's no surprise, then, that the Speaker Lapdesk N700 from Logitech is a great product.

The N700 is essentially a laptop riser with a built-in fan, integrated stereo speakers and a padded base. It's powered via a single USB cable, meaning that you won't need to carry a messy clump of cables around with you to keep the device powered. It also means carrying it around with your laptop plugged into it is not a problem. The built-in speakers are easily the best thing about the N700, because they're surprisingly crisp, clear and loud. They're obviously not the best speakers available, but they definitely outperform the speakers built into most laptops, including those of most high-end gaming notebooks. The N700 also features volume controls that let you adjust the volume of the speakers without needing to touch the laptop.

As awesome as the speakers are, the cooling potential of the N700 isn't particularly mind-blowing. We tested the unit with an MSI GT740 gaming notebook and, both when idling and under load, the N700 was only capable of dropping the temperature of the notebook's hardware (which, like all gaming notebooks, runs quite hot even when idling) by 1°. Where the fan did come in handy was when resting the laptop on your lap.

### Features

- Two-inch stereo speakers built-in
- Padded base
- Ten-degree angled riser
- Powered via USB

Without the lapdesk, we're fairly certain that extended use of a gaming notebook on your lap could result in lots of singed hair, a pair of melted pants and a short trip to the nearest hospital to be treated for burn wounds that doctors will mistake for those inflicted by a house fire. Well, that's an exaggeration – but we know that at some point or another there'd be pain involved. Thankfully, the N700 will remove this issue, whether you're using a gaming notebook or a regular one. The airflow created by the fan (which is completely silent) will keep your lap cool and keep the singed hairs to a minimum. The N700 is also very comfortable, with its padded base and raised angle making for ergonomic laptop use.

If you're a notebook user and you're looking for a lapdesk that'll increase your comfort levels, provide awesome audio and offer a little extra cooling, the N700 is great. We'd buy it just for the speakers if it wasn't so expensive. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

### THE SCORE

>**PLUS**

- + Surprisingly good speakers
- + Comfortable
- + Silent fan

>**MINUS**

- Minimal cooling potential
- Expensive

### Bottom Line

It may not have much gaming relevance, but the N700 boasts the high-quality design for which Logitech is renowned.

08  
out of ten

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# ASUS M4A89GTD PRO/USB3

**CHIPSETS FOR CPUs HAVE** always been a finicky business. On the one hand, no single chipset delivers significantly better performance than the one it replaces – at least not enough to make it a must-have upgrade. However, the flip side to that is the chipset brings new CPU support and in general, at least to enthusiasts, overclocks better than the chipset it replaces.

With AMD's 890GX chipset, the changes from the 790GX are slim to say the least. For the most part, these changes are limited to SATA 6Gbps support and full PCI-Express 2.0 Crossfire support (8x and 8x in Multi-GPU mode). While USB3.0 support is lacking, ASUS has made use of a third party NEC chip to support USB3.0 devices.

Along with USB3.0, the motherboard supports the Phenom II X6, however it should be noted that the older chipset is also capable of supporting the upcoming six-core AMD CPU and will likely be limited to BIOS support on older motherboards rather than actual chipset compatibility. Having said that, if you're looking for the most up to date chipset from AMD in the mainstream market, you should not consider anything else other than a 890GX based motherboard and from the benchmarks, the ASUS board is probably as good as it will get at

## Benchmarks

**Super Pi 8M:** 3 min 3.055 seconds  
**CineBench 11.5:** 4.29  
**Everest Read:** 10,275 MB/sec  
**Everest Copy:** 11,951 MB/sec  
**Everest Write:** 8,588 MB/sec  
**Latency:** 45.3ns



this price point.

For those who employ on-board video, the new chipset features a graphics adapter from the HD4000 series which means full DirectX10.1 support, accelerated HD video and if you're willing to put up with very low graphics settings, games can be played using the on-board graphics adapter. Performance wise, you'll be hard pressed to notice the difference between motherboards based on this chipset and the older 790GX core. If, however, you plan on overclocking, you'll fair much better with this newer core than the older one as reaching a 250MHz HT clock is very easy on this board.

The M4A89GTD PRO is probably as refined an 890GX based board as we are likely to see and is definitely worth looking into if you're in the market. **NAG Neo Sibeko**

## Specifications

**Chipset:** AMD 890GX+ 850SB  
**Memory banks:** 4xDDR3 184-pin  
**CPU Support:** AMD AM3 Phenom II / Athlon II  
**Slots:** 2x PCI-E 16X (8x8), 1x PCI-E 1X, 2xPCI 2.2, 1x PCI-E4X

## THE SCORE

**>Plus**  
 + DirectX10.1 IGP  
 + USB3.0  
 + SATA 6Gbps

**>Minus**  
 - Nothing

### Bottom Line

A fully featured 890GX motherboard with support for all the latest technologies at a reasonable price.

07  
out of ten

# PIRATING OF GAMES IS A CRIME!

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# Sapphire Radeon HD5450

**I**F THERE WAS EVER a time when ATI had a near-perfect product in its 25 year history it's now with the HD5000 series of cards. Not only are they speedy, quiet, cool and rich in API support, they are more affordable than anything the competition has to offer.

However, what is always true about entry-level cards or rather ultra low-end parts such as the HD5450 is that they are not sold on performance but API and video acceleration abilities only. This is because the performance is usually too poor to properly take advantage of almost all the APIs they support. The Radeon HD5450 is no exception to this as you can see from the performance figures in the DirectX11 Heaven benchmark.

So if you are looking for a graphics card with which to take advantage of DirectX11, DirectX10 or the later DirectX9 titles, you may have to look somewhere else. However, if you're willing to make some sacrifices in image quality you can get away with playable frame rates in titles such as Crysis Warhead, which was very playable at 1,024 x 768 with the Performance Profile selected.

Resident Evil 5 didn't fare so well in the DirectX10 mode at the same resolution but was playable (above 33fps) in its DirectX9 guise, which is great news for those on a really tight budget.



## Specifications

**Core:** 650MHz Cedar (40nm)  
**Processors:** 80  
**Render Outputs:** 8  
**Memory:** 512MB GDDR3 800MHz (25.6GB/sec)  
**API:** DirectX11/OpenGL 3.x /OpenCL 1.0

## Benchmarks

**Heaven Benchmark 1.0:** 171  
**3DMark Vantage:** P1273  
**Crysis Warhead (performance profile):** 44.93  
**Resident Evil 5:** 24

For the OEM market, which is what the 5450 is really targeted at, it is more than sufficient as it supports full HD video acceleration of the major formats and containers, full Aero support, needs no power plug and has a power profile as low as one could ever expect from a discreet graphics card. For the price it's a perfect fit, even though the performance leaves much to be desired as a gaming card. **NAG**  
**Neo Sibeko**

## THE SCORE

<b>&gt;Plus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ DirectX 11</li> <li>+ Price</li> </ul>	<b>&gt;Minus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Performance</li> </ul>
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### >Bottom Line

An entry-level DirectX11 card suitable for HTPCs and very low-end gaming machines.

**07**  
out of ten

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# Cooler Master GX-750W PSU



**C**OOLER MASTER IS, IF you will, the Golf GTI of the computing world. This is because there is no single product from the company that is the best in any one area; however no other manufacturer can put together products that strike as perfect a balance between price, power, performance, build quality and features.

If that analogy doesn't help sell the PSU to you, then perhaps the single 12V rail rated at 60Amps will do a little better. Please note that just because it's a single 12V line does not mean there's only one single PCI-Express connector; to the contrary there are four, each capable of being used in their six- or eight-pin guise, so most SLI and Crossfire options are supported. The importance of a single, powerful 12V rail cannot be understated. Under heavy loads, and in particular where overclocking of either the graphics card(s) or CPU, a PSU with a single rail will not only hold load much better, it will result mostly in better overclocking frequencies and stability.

Examples of this are the yet to be released, at the time of writing, Intel Gulftown-based CPUs which perform better with a single powerful 12V line than any other configuration. This also seems to hold true for the GTX480 graphics card, which draws significant amounts of power from the 12V rail.

Even though it's rated at 750W, because of the electronics design it's able to

## Specifications

**Total Power:** 750W  
**Max Output Capacity:** 900W  
**12V Rails:** 1x60A (4 connectors)  
**Efficiency:** 80% +  
**Features:** SLI, Crossfire, ATX 2.2, EPS

outpace a number of 1,000W units and deliver more stable power with smaller ripple across all rails. It's true that some will lament the fact that this PSU is not modular, however this PSU is built for heavy load and performance before everything else, and making it modular would have likely sacrificed some of the performance. The Cooler Master GX-750W unit is without question the best 750W unit we have tested.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

## THE SCORE

>**Plus**  
+ Single 12V Rail  
+ Quiet

>**Minus**  
- None modular  
- 3-way SLI support missing

### >Bottom Line

Unpretentious enthusiast orientated PSU that handles load exceptionally well. Probably the best sub 1KW unit we have ever tested.

09  
out of ten

# Huntkey X7 900W PSU

**H**UNTKEY IS A NAME that should be familiar to any power user or enthusiast. While not a high-profile company like some of its competitors, the company does produce solid mid- to high-end products that usually match the competitions' offerings, but regularly beat them in price.

The Huntkey X7 is no exception to this, and besides packing the proverbial "mean punch", this PSU, while simple, is quite appealing to the eye. The modular cabling system is easy to understand: it's not only labelled clearly, it's colour coded as well, making it almost impossible to plug in the wrong leads to the PSU. While only the peripheral connectors are removable on most PSUs, the X7's ATX 12V CPU connector is also removable. It's hardly necessary since it's unlikely you won't need that connector, but the feature is there nonetheless.

But nobody buys a 900W PSU for its cabling; they buy it for its power delivery. This is where the X7 delivers as expected, but it leaves some questions with regards to its 12V line distribution. While many manufacturers split their 12V load unnecessarily over several lines, Huntkey has split it four ways with each line only capable of 18 Amps for a total rating of 72A. The logic behind this escapes us, and this configuration is not going to work for extreme overclocking. It will result

## Specifications

**Total Power:** 900W  
**Max Output Capacity:** 1,200W  
**12V Rails:** 4 x 18A (4 connectors)  
**Efficiency:** 80% +  
**Features:** SLI, Crossfire, ATX 2.2, EPS

in random restarts, freezes and most certainly a system that will not overclock well with a Gulftown based CPU or a GF100 based graphics card.

For the vast majority of people (gamers included) however, the X7 is more than enough and is certainly worth considering if you are in the market for a high-power PSU.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

## THE SCORE

>**Plus**  
+ Modular  
+ Aesthetics  
+ Affordable

>**Minus**  
- 18A 12V Rails

### >Bottom Line

One of the more affordable 900W PSUs on the market with good build quality and every certification a PSU needs.

07  
out of ten



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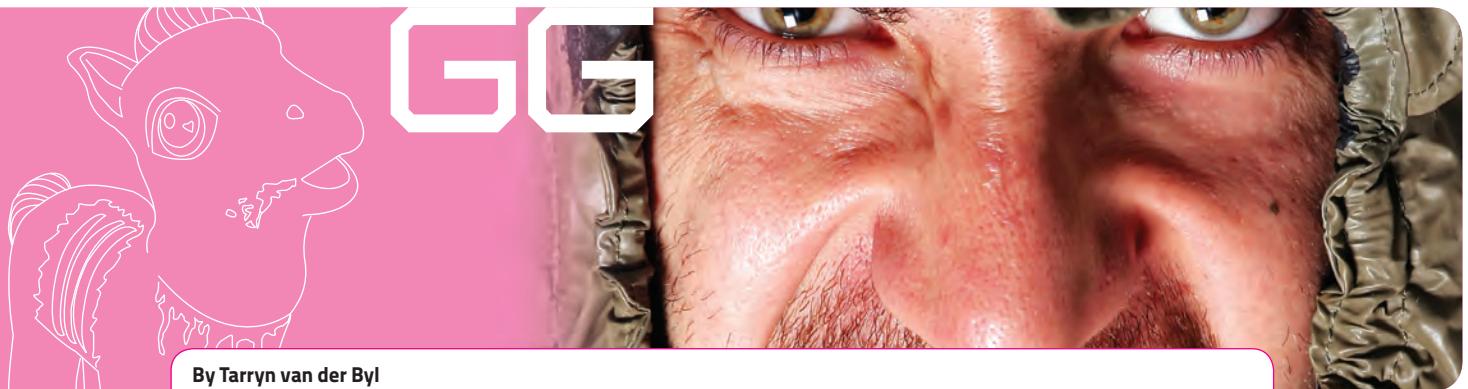
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By Tarryn van der Byl

## Winner in game, loser in life

**Y**OU'VE TOTALLY HEARD ABOUT Bu.Rogers, of course. Bu.Rogers is the most bestest and hardcorest gamer in the history of the universe, and he's got the super prestigious #1 place on the world's Battlefield: Bad Company 2 leader boards to prove it. Bu.Rogers played hard to get where he is – that's over 45 000 kills (with a 95% headshot frequency, mind you) to just 320 deaths, in about 100 hours. That's 450 kills per hour. That's a kill/death ratio of 140 to 1. That's AMAZING. Not least of all because the guy at #2 has a kill/death ratio of just 4.6/1. Bu.Rogers is literally 30x more betterer and hardcore than that guy. Bu.Rogers is the man.

And Bu.Rogers is not only the most bestest and hardcorest gamer on the planet, but he's also a grand philanthropist. Instead of hanging out with all the hot chicks who must surely be lining up to procreate with him and make the most bestest and hardcorest babies ever, he hangs out on the servers with VisionX2000, who must be the most worsteest gamer in the history of the universe. This luckless noob has only 51 kills to just over 45 000 deaths.

If you got bored with all the numbers and skipped straight to the third paragraph then, Bu.Rogers and VisionX2000 are the same person on two different game accounts, and together with some other feckless, terminal no lifer (or probably just a third account), these morons spend entire matches fragging and reviving each other over and over to artificially inflate their scores and career stats. It's called stat padding, and it's really cool if you're the sort of person who stays in on weekends and pads stats. Although I think if you're the sort of person who has

to run three PCs and a bunch of complex macros to have friends, you don't have much else to do on the weekends anyway. Unless it's your biannual serial rapist weekend.

What's perhaps most impressive here is Bu.Rogers' casual disregard for subtlety, and that's really only impressive as a kind of outrageous psychopathology. I mean, in what supernatural alternate reality is a 140

*\* Always, I wanna be with you  
And make believe with you,  
And live in harmony, harmony,  
Oh love. \*\**

*\*\* The six degrees of separation rule doesn't work with Robot Unicorn Attack. It's always just one step wish away.*

k/d somehow magically not a 300-ft neon billboard announcing, "I'M CHEATING LOL"? Wherever that is, I'm guessing it's also full of flying dolphins and robot unicorns\*. At least he'll have those flying dolphins and robot unicorns to hold and comfort him now, though, since EA nuked his stats this morning. How do you kill that which has no life? Like that. **NAG**

### Experience Points

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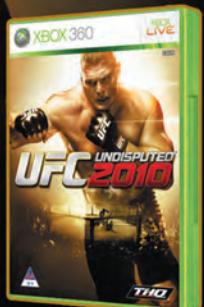
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